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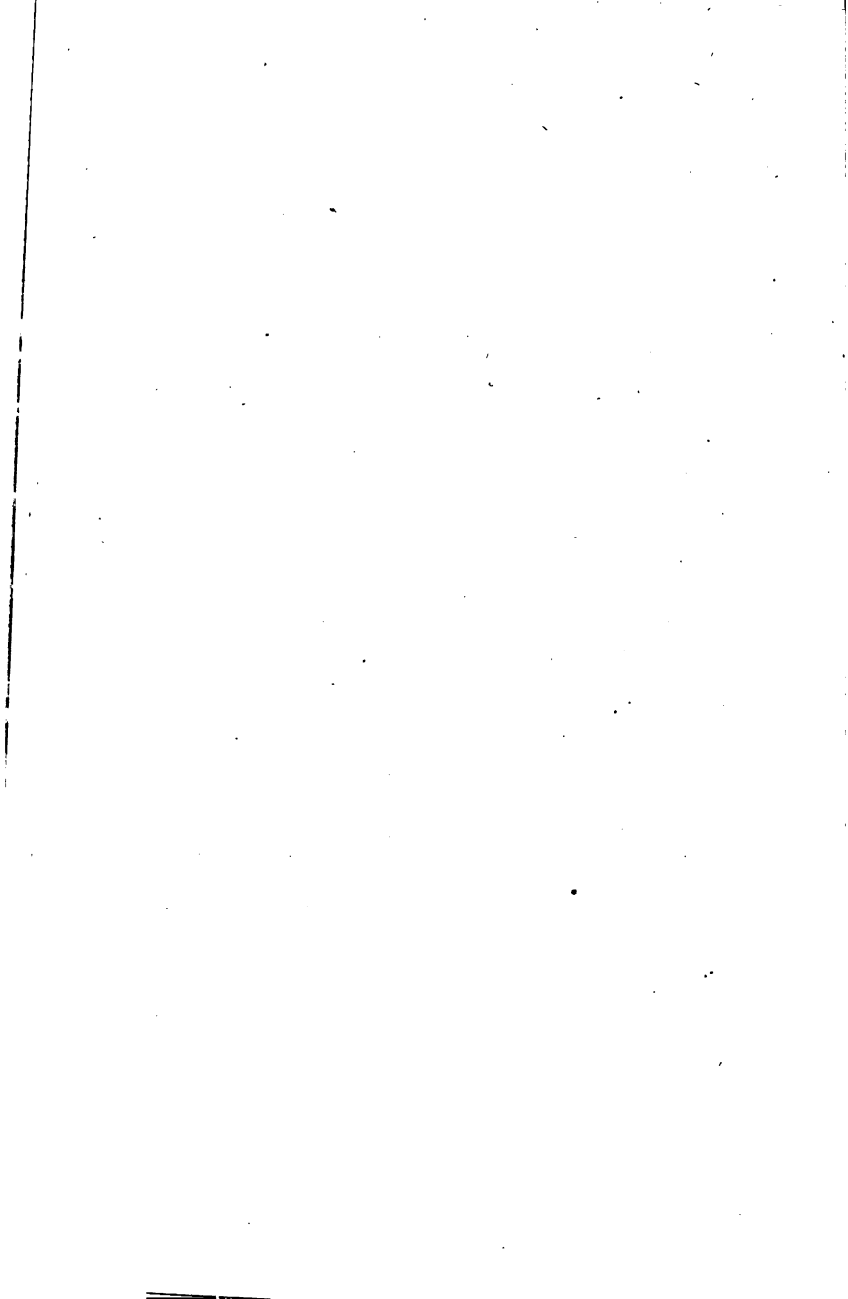
THE BEQUEST OF  
ARTHUR STUART WALCOTT

Class of 1891

JUNE 1, 1923



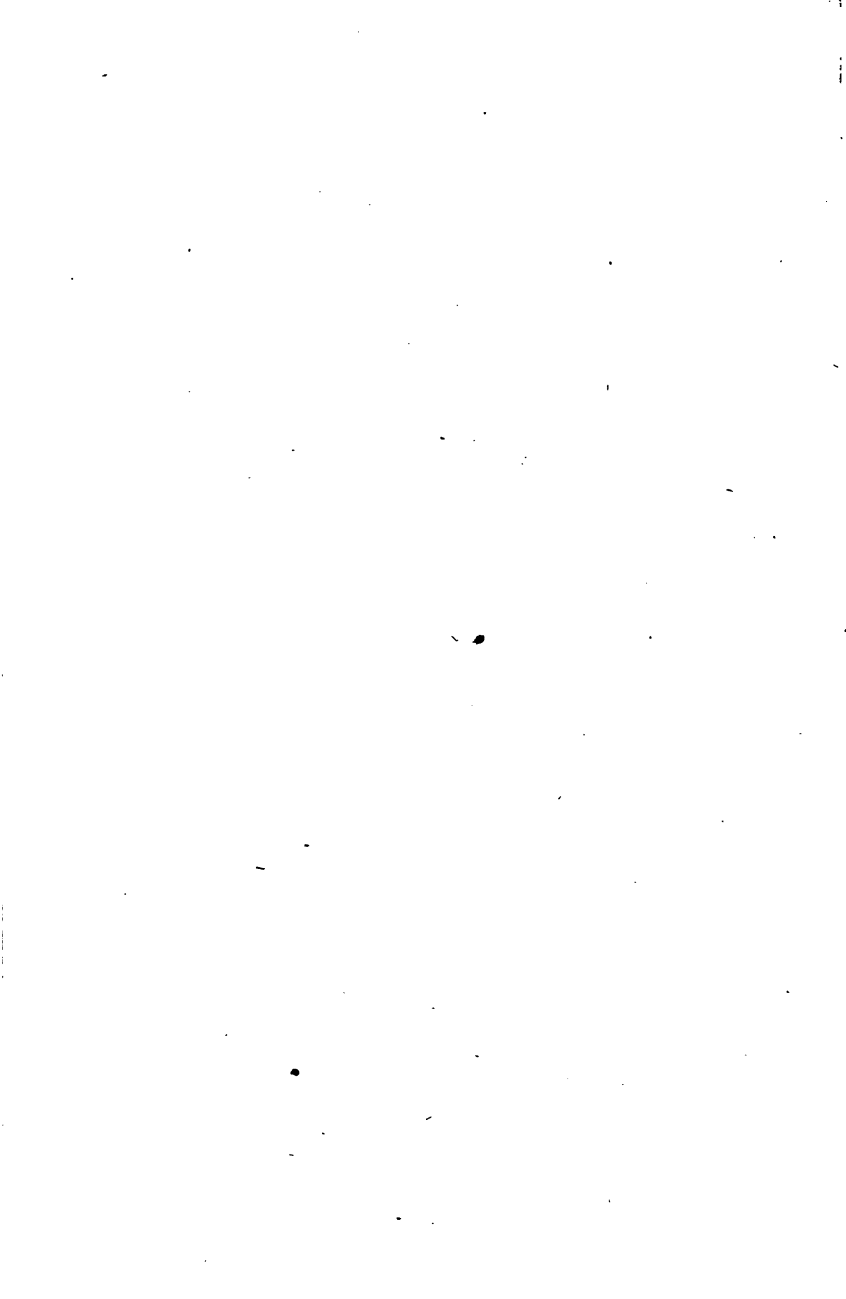




B. J. Walcott.

1881.

"New Year's Day"



**THE HEAD OF MEDUSA.**





THE  
HEAD OF MEDUSA.

BY  
GEORGE FLEMING,  
AUTHOR OF "KISMET" AND "MIRAGE."

"... doch fall ich unbesiegt, und meine Waffen  
Sind nicht gebrochen; nur mein' Herze brach!"



BOSTON:  
ROBERTS BROTHERS.  
1880.

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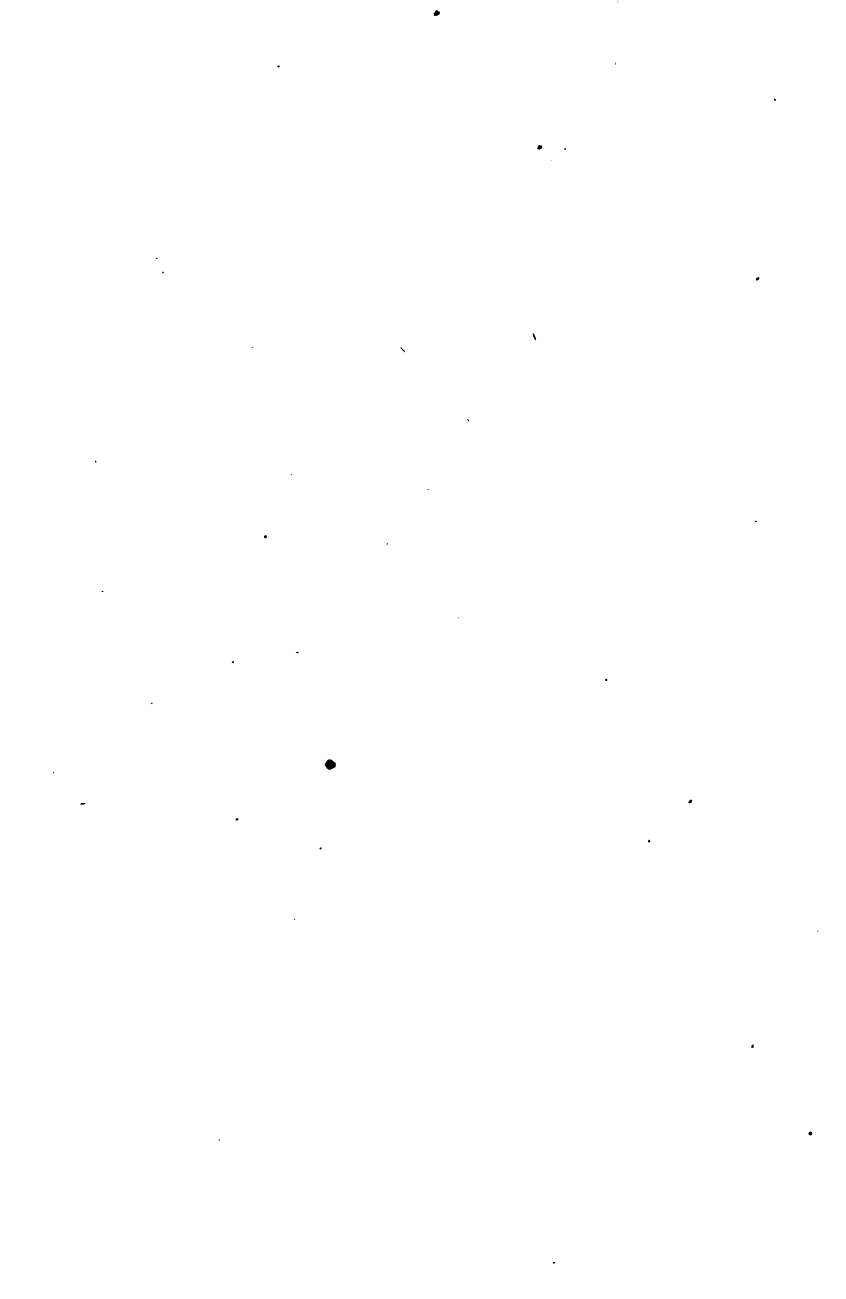
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I DEDICATE this book to my dear mother; begging her to accept it from me as one more proof—where surely no proof is needed—of my deep love for her, my admiration, and my profound respect.

GEORGE FLEMING.

QUEEN ANNE'S MANSIONS,  
August, 1880.



# THE HEAD OF MEDUSA.



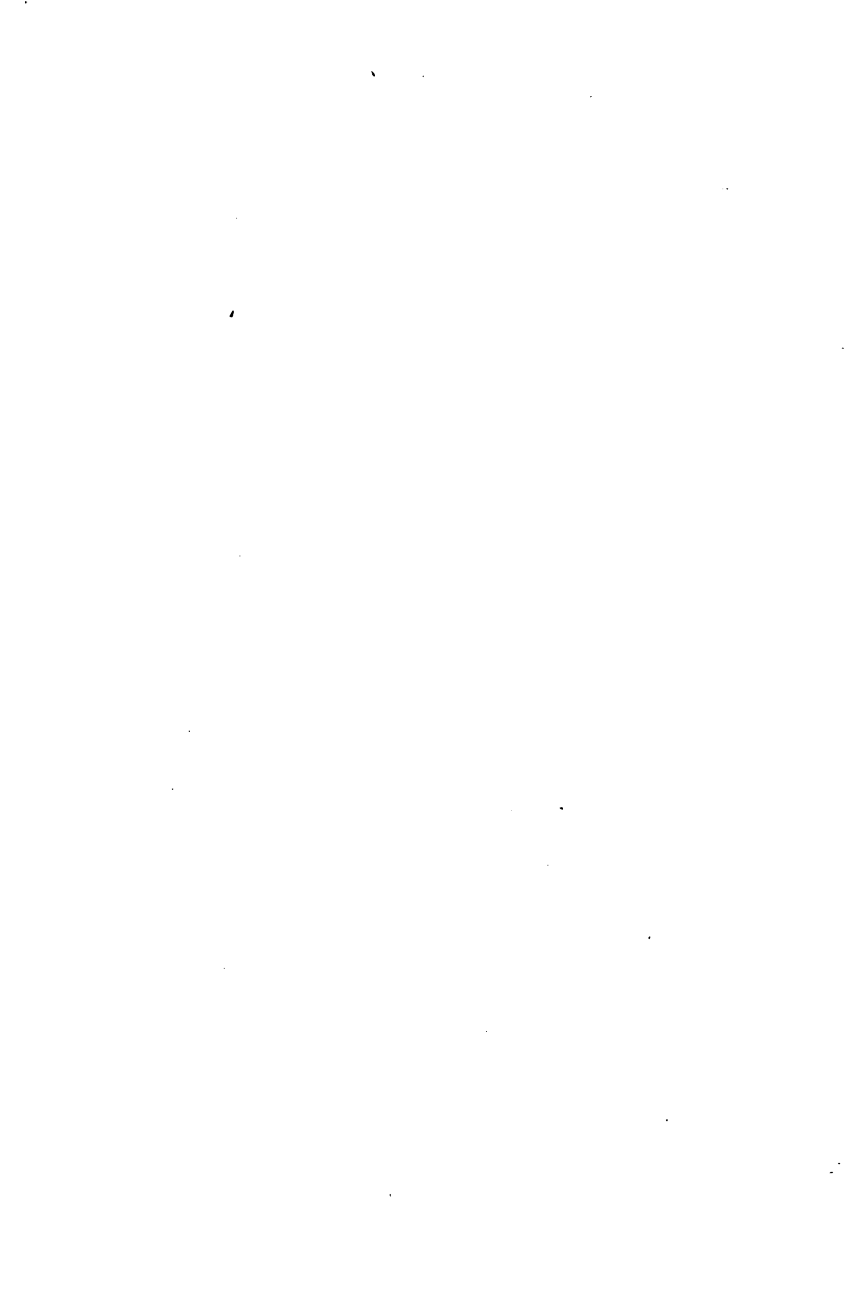
## BOOK I.

### A GIRL'S CHOICE.

"It is the action of the will that causes the unconscious habit; it is the continual effort of the beginning that creates the hoarded energy of the end." — W. BAGEHOT, *Physics and Politics*.

"It is ideals that inspire conduct though from afar." — MORLEY,  
*On Compromise*.





# THE HEAD OF MEDUSA.

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## PRELUDE.

THE spring began early last year in Rome. Towards five o'clock one sunny afternoon in March, a stream of foot-passengers was moving steadily up the two broad walks which lead to the Pincian Hill, while the long glittering line of carriages defiling slowly before the music made it difficult to cross the road.

The younger Italians were gathered for the most part in two closely serried ranks in front of the band. Behind them was that open space commonly called the Piazzale. It was here that many carriages paused for a little, giving much opportunity for comment, anecdote, and recognition to the critical Roman crowd.

At the extreme end of this enclosure, a man of about five-and-forty, dressed in a rough gray shooting-coat, stood leaning against a tree and smoking. His face and general appearance marked him out at once as an Englishman. The absence of all acquaintance on his part with any of the occupants of the various carriages showed him to be a stranger. He had been one of the first to arrive that afternoon.

He stood facing toward the Trinita de Monti, looking down the road. He could see each carriage a long distance off; he watched each new arrival with the same quiet intentness of observation. Once or twice, when a closed landau passed him, he even moved forward sufficiently to look into its windows as it drove by, but his curiosity had thus far been rewarded only by the sight of some portly dowager wrapped in furs, or, as in one instance, by meeting the oblique, impassible glance of a priest.

This persistency had ended by attracting the attention of the man who stood nearest to him, whose first look of inquiry had rapidly deepened into a continuous stare. For a few moments he seemed to hesitate, but, presently turning, he asked his neighbor for a light. The Englishman took a box of matches from his pocket, and handed them to him without speaking. His neighbor lighted his cigar deliberately, and then, raising his hat, —

“I thank you, Signor Lesseterre,” he said.

Lexeter looked up abruptly. Was there not something familiar to him in these brilliant black eyes à *fleur de tête*, the yellow skin and heavy coarse mustache of his interlocutor?

As his mind went confusedly back, seeking to classify this face among old memories, the gentleman smiled again.

“You do not remember me? It is many years ago, but I have an excellent memory — *una memoria stupenda*. I am Cavaliere Borgia — Marcantonio Borgia, at your service.”

He went on smiling, and extended a thick yellowish hand. Lexeter took it without any corresponding enthusiasm.

"I have met you very often at Lalli's — in the country — nine years ago. You remember Madame Lalli? Ah, Cesco is my very good friend. A friendship of youth, one does not lose that. A friend of youth, that is precious, that does not easily replace itself, eh, Signor Lesseterre?"

"Undoubtedly," said Lexeter, looking at his stick.

"You have not forgotten your Italian? That is good — that is wonderful — *stupendo*. You have never been back again since then?"

"Never."

"*Già, già*. Of course. But one always returns to Rome."

He took off his hat to a passing carriage. The lady within bent her head vaguely, in answer to his salutation. She was young; she was pale; she looked chilled. Her listless glance wandered heavily and blankly across the crowd. Many other men took off their hats to her.

"The Duchess of ——. A charming woman — *simpatica, stupenda*." The cavaliere ran his yellow fingers through his hair. "You do not know her? No? Not even by sight?" He himself had been presented to her the day before, at the end of an Embassy ball, where he had spent the night in a corner, speaking to no one, and completely unknown.

He began now to give some details of her private history, until, growing conscious that Lexeter was

according him the smallest possible amount of attention, he stopped short in the midst of a sentence, shrugged his heavy shoulders, —

“*Gid!* these are follies — follies. But what is life without them, Signor Lesseterre? Life in Italy? Ah, you English! As I said to my friend Cesco when he took an English wife —”

Lexeter did not move, but his face darkened.

“Madame Lalli is American,” he said shortly.

“American — English; it is all the same. A cat is a cat even when he is gray. Principles, they have principles enough, *che diavolo!* Now, a woman like the little duchess — *Basta!*”

He took out his handkerchief and shook it. A strong smell of patchouli filled the air.

“You have not seen the Lallis? — my friend Cesco and his wife?” he asked abruptly.

This time Lexeter looked at him.

“I have not seen them.”

“Ah! You are here, perhaps, only for a little while?”

“For a day merely.”

The music — they were playing a Strauss waltz — ended with a clash of instruments. All at once the confused murmur of voices became more audible. There was a thinning of the crowd. Many carriages moved away. The sun, which had been under a cloud, just above the dome of St. Peter’s, shone out again, gilding the rapid wheels and turning the fine dust into a soft, powdery, golden haze. Some children were chasing each other about among the roses.



A great many women passed by slowly, dragging their dresses in the dust, laughing and talking beneath their large white parasols.

"Is — do you happen to know if either of the Lallis is in town?" asked Lexeter abruptly.

"*Che diavolo!* but you have not seen them then," his companion answered, with the air of propounding an entirely new idea. "Yes, they are both here for a day or two. Only a day. They live near Albano now, farther up in the mountains. Madame Lalli has a place there. They call it — wait a moment — *Che diavolo!* am I losing my memory? She is benevolent; she teaches children the alphabet, how to knit stockings." He laughed and shrugged his shoulders. "Cesco is here constantly. Apparently he does not care for life at Villa — Villa —? Wait, I have it."

Lexeter knew the name perfectly. He had returned that very morning from Albano. He had been shown all over the villa in question by the servant left in charge. He had even visited the school. But he did not choose to say so. He even hesitated fastidiously at receiving information from this man. He would not ask for Lalli's town address, although he derived a distinct sensation of disgust from reflecting that this man undoubtedly knew it. All information grew distasteful coming from this channel.

"And your friend, the young man who was always with you, signor — il Signor Hardinge?" Borgia went on, with a certain maliciousness of emphasis, "is he, too, come back to Rome to meet my good friend Cesco?"

Lexeter glanced sharply at him, and made no answer. A moment later there was a movement about the music-stand; the musicians took up their instruments.

"Good-morning," said Lexeter suddenly, touching his hat with two fingers.

He moved away across the road as the first notes of the overture to "*Tannhäuser*" stole tremulously out. There was something peculiar about his way of walking. He was slightly lame. Borgia had forgotten this circumstance. He remarked it now, and it gave him a certain feeling of satisfaction. Our neighbors' personal defects are often apt to strike us in the light of compliments.

Lexeter turned to the left. He passed through some scattered shrubbery into a broad path, screened from the road on one hand by a row of wide-spreading larches. The low parapet on the other side is the Pincian boundary wall. A hundred feet below, in the shadow, the tangled tree-tops of the Borghese Villa looked like a delicate cloud of dun-colored smoke. Here and there a stone pine made a dark round spot. The sky was cloudless and limpid, — a vast pale expanse of blue suffused with golden light. Away to the west, the cypresses of Monte Mario made a distinct silhouette against that clearness. The sun was still shining on the white walls of the villa.

Lexeter thought himself alone. The crowd had streamed back to the music. He was not an even-tempered man. He leaned over the parapet and looked down.

"Confound the fellow!" he said savagely. He struck the open palm of his hand against the stone.

But almost at the same moment he was conscious of the presence of another person, — a woman dressed in black, seated on a bench at a little distance from him, and talking to a child. Her back was towards him, and he could not see her features. When he first caught sight of her, her head was bent down; she was looking at something she was holding. The child pressed forward eagerly to see it too.

"Be careful, Guido," the lady said with a laugh.

At the first sound of her voice Lexeter turned hastily. His face changed. He started to his feet and there stood still, irresolute.

"Ah, I was afraid so. It is dead. You have killed it. Poor butterfly! Take it away, dear. Go and bury it over there among the trees," she went on gently, in her full, even, caressing tones.

She rose as she spoke; she drew the black lace closer together about her throat, and walked slowly over to the parapet, a few yards away from Lexeter. He could see her face now. That face was paler, — it seemed to him the line of the cheek was fuller than when he had last seen it. She had not noticed his presence. She stood with one gloved hand resting on the stone, looking vaguely off at the horizon.

Lexeter cast one rapid glance in her direction, he half turned his back upon her, he did not wish to be recognized yet. At that moment his strongest impression was one of unreality. For years past, in certain moods, the thought of this possible meeting had

had the power of moving him with indescribable tenderness and expectation. But after the fashion of things which have been long and ardently pre-imagined, it seemed to have lost the definite outline of reality. A few paces farther down, where the walk ended, a marble statue was shining in the last level rays of the sun. The circular strip of grass about its feet was all powdered over with small pink and white daisies. Lexeter fixed his eyes upon these stupidly, and waited — he did not know for what. It seemed to him the most natural thing in the world that he should be standing so.

The afternoon was very still. There was no wind. It was too far off to hear the music; only the more strident notes reached them at irregular intervals, detached, and without modulation. Presently there were footsteps, the quick pattering footsteps of a child crunching upon the gravel of the walk. The sound faltered and ceased in front of Lexeter. He looked up. A little boy was watching him curiously.

“What is the matter with you? What makes you stand like that? Why don’t you walk about?” he demanded boldly, fixing his great dark eyes upon the stranger’s face. “Perhaps you are ill and you *can’t* walk,” he suggested gravely; “shall I go and tell mamma?” Lexeter smiled down at him.

“So you are little Guido Cardella?” he said, and held out his hand. The child came forward without the slightest hesitation, and put his little warm fingers into it.

"Are you one of the people who knew me when I was a baby?" he asked confidently, with the air of referring to some well-known period of history. "Are you the gentleman who gave old Prince to my mamma? And did you have him when he was quite a puppy? Tell me all about him when he was a puppy."

"Guido," said Lexeter abruptly, "go and say to — your mother," he hesitated over the word, "that an old friend of hers is here and would like to speak to her."

The child ran off with the promptness of a habit of loving obedience. Lexeter followed slowly after him. His heart was beating perceptibly. "At my age!" he said to himself with a sort of stupefied irony. But the irony was only lip deep, — the tribute we all render mechanically to the fetich of habit. Never in all his experience, never at any time of his youth, had he been possessed by deeper emotion than at the sound of those first low words of greeting from Barbara.

She had changed very much in these nine years. It was almost the first thing he noticed distinctly about her. He had been right in thinking her cheeks had grown fuller; but there were new lines about the mouth, the contour of the chin was more defined, the whole face had undergone an indescribable change. He told her so after a moment.

"Yes," she said simply. "It is all such a long, long while ago." She looked at him, and her beautifully cut lips suddenly parted in a smile, — that well-



remembered smile! "It is so like you to tell me I have grown an old woman."

Lexeter smiled too. He took off his hat and passed his hand over his forehead. He was all at once conscious of a singular feeling of satisfaction, — of happiness even. He drew a long breath, and leaned back against the parapet.

"I have been watching for you all the afternoon, over there," he said, indicating the Piazzale with a motion of his eyes.

"You have been here and I did not know of it?" she repeated regretfully, with something of the same full sweetness of intonation she had used in speaking to Guido. "If I had only known it! But I seldom go near the music. Crowds — I think they frighten me. I dislike crowds, you remember."

"I remember," he said gravely.

"And more than ever now. I come here so seldom. We live almost entirely in the country now, beyond Albano."

He thought again of the lonely villa he had seen there.

"And we are going back to-night," she added suddenly. "I wish I had known. Oh, why did you not come here sooner? I shall hardly have seen anything of you at all; and I had so much to ask you," she said, in a childlike tone of disappointment.

Lexeter turned his brown eyes slowly towards her, and did not answer. He was thinking of the days he had wasted searching for her home.

"I — I wish I *could* ask you to come and see me," she added, speaking very low.

Lexeter moved uneasily.

"How is Count Lalli?" he asked abruptly, after a silence.

"Very well."

"Is he —?"

He thrust the end of his stick under a loose pebble, and buried it deep in the soft earth of the walk. "I saw — I have been talking with an old friend of yours," he said. The word "friend" slipped out quite unintentionally. He was speaking at random.

"Yes?"

Barbara rested one gloved hand upon the other and looked at him.

"Oh, I only meant that man Borgia — Cavaliere Borgia," said Lexeter hastily, with a forced laugh.

Her heart seemed to stop beating for an instant, and then contracted painfully.

"Oh, I know him so slightly," she said. Her lips trembled. At that moment Lexeter fairly hated himself.

"I am so sorry not to see more of you," she went on rapidly after a moment's pause. "You must have so much to tell me about yourself all these years; and I should like to show you my schools. You did not know that I had a charity school now? We have two — one on each of Count Lalli's places; and Guido helps me," she said, looking down and resting her hand on the boy's shoulder. He pressed nearer to her, and rubbed his cheek slowly against the fur on her sleeve.

"We were to have had a small fever-hospital —

some of the harvesters suffer terribly, and Rome is so far to go. But that would have cost — I mean — there are so many claims. One cannot always do what one thinks would be for the best without hurting other people — people one must not hurt. It is quite terrible sometimes to think how one may, so easily, be adding to the pain in the world.”

She spoke in a hurried way, with a sort of sob in her voice. It seemed as if some new experience were giving vividness to the images in her mind.

“And that — that is the way you spend your life,” said Lexeter bitterly.

“Mr. Lexeter — ”

Their eyes met for a moment, and rested there with a grave and mournful avowal. It seemed to them both that so much had been asked and answered in that brief interval.

Presently she turned her head and looked away past him to the faint sunny outline of Soracte. Gradually the agitated look passed from her face; her large full-lidded eyes fixed themselves upon the distant line of mountains with an expression in them as of an habitual and accepted want.

“Barbara!”

The sun was setting now. Even here, among the trees, the spaces were filled with a reflected light. The musicians were playing the last notes of the last waltz. The wind which had risen with the sunset brought these in fuller cadence. It brought with it as well the perfume of the violets which Barbara wore on her breast. She was standing close beside him.

Again he was conscious of that overpowering sense of expectation. His heart began beating thickly. Involuntarily he half put out his hand and drew it back.

"Barbara!"

She looked at him gently. Her eyes were moist with tears, but she smiled.

"There is always Guido," she said under her breath. "*And to give thanks is good, and to forgive.*"

Lexeter stared at her hard for a moment. His hope sank suddenly, like a candle that has been blown out.

"Yes, you are right; you are always right," he said.

The words held no meaning for him. His mind was filled with a certain vague feeling of contempt for himself. He suddenly felt that he had grown old. Just then Guido came up to him, taking firm hold of his hand to swing himself back a little, looking up into his face.

"They thought old Prince was going to die last year," he said earnestly, with the air of resuming an interrupted story, "and mamma cried. Should you have cried when you had him if he had been going to die when he was a puppy?"

Lexeter put out his other hand and silently smoothed the curly hair back from the boy's forehead.

"I think it was a gentleman called Mr. Hardinge who gave that dog to your mamma, my boy," he said after a moment. He turned to Barbara. "Walter

was in town last summer for a day or two. I saw him there. I dined with him at his hotel. He has hardly changed at all. He looks — exactly the same."

"Yes. I always imagined —"

She shivered slightly. A faint flush passed over her pale cheeks. She pressed the tips of her gloved fingers against her lips. Lexeter glanced at her sideways and looked down.

"Hardinge has been making a great name for himself — writing some papers on political economy. I can send them to you if you like. There is some chance now, I think, of his going into Congress. I hope he will, dear old boy. I always look upon Walter as upon some of the yeast which is to leaven the whole loaf. Walter was born successful."

She moved slightly, but did not answer. Her hands were clasped together. He did not see her face.

"He was in town only for a few days," said Lexeter slowly. At that moment it seemed to him that he had come to Rome merely to say this. He made a distinct effort to put more life into his voice. He felt like an actor who was garbling his part. "He was there — alone. Mrs. Hardinge had stayed with the children in America."

"How is Octave, do you know?"

"I think," he said, "she was very well; just as usual."

"And they still live at his place on the Hudson?"

"Yes."

"And in the winter they go to Washington?"

"I believe so."

"I have not heard from Octave for years," said Barbara, still a little tremulously. "At first she used to write to me, but people drift apart. We are neither of us good correspondents. And people drift apart." Her eyes suddenly filled with tears. "I am glad to have seen you. You are very good to me," she said.

"I? Not at all," said Lexeter automatically. It gave him a certain feeling of impatience to hear himself thus spoken of. What was the use of it? Everything had been said.

She turned to go. "Come, Guido."

"Your carriage is waiting for you? Allow me to see you as far as your carriage," he said, with the same sensation of reciting a prearranged part. They walked down the broad alley in silence. They turned to the left, following the division wall. The sun had set; this part of the promenade was entirely deserted. Already the radiance was gone from the sky. The trees of the Ludovisi Villa were all in shadow; the color of the fields was growing uniform, with here and there a darker line of cypresses.

There were many marble busts—heads of poets, of senators, of soldiers—standing in pale relief among the shrubbery. Lexeter looked up at one of these as they passed. It was the head of Leopardi. "It was here that I met you one morning," he said in a low voice. And each of them remembered that day.

When they came within sight of the carriage,

which was waiting by the entrance-gate, Guido ran forward and climbed up joyously beside the coachman. "I shall drive. I want to drive all the way home," he said.

Barbara started at the sound of his voice. It was then she turned and gave both hands to her companion.

"I have been so glad — I want you to believe how glad I have been to see you," she said earnestly. "You do believe this?"

He looked at her fixedly, and a curious sort of smile passed over his pale face.

"Good-by!"

"But you do believe it?" she persisted timidly.

Lexeter put her into the carriage and shut the door. He spread the fur rug carefully over her knees.

"Are you quite warm enough?" he asked.

"Quite warm, thank you."

He stood there irresolute a moment, still holding the handle of the door. But when had it been possible for him to resist that pleading tone in her voice?

"I *do* believe it," he said abruptly. "You were always a good girl, Barbara. You have a tender heart."

He stepped back and lifted his hat.

"I shall send you those reviews when I get home to England." The same dubious smile contracted his lips. "Drive on, coachman!"

"Drive on!" repeated Guido joyously, clapping his hands.

Lexeter did not stand looking after the carriage. On the contrary, as soon as Barbara had driven off, he turned immediately about and began retracing his steps to the promenade. Under the ilexes in front of the French Academy, half a dozen ragged children, who were dabbling their fingers in the water of the fountain, ran up to him and begged for a sou. The eldest of them was a flower-girl, who followed him for some distance, offering the contents of her half-empty basket. At first Lexeter paid no attention to her. She was continuing her importunity mechanically and with no idea of a sale, when, just at the entrance-gate, he turned suddenly, threw a piece of money into her basket, and without looking at her, took up a bunch of violets which he fastened in his coat.

"But I have no change, signore," the girl said deprecatingly, closing her dirty fingers promptly over the note.

"Then you have no business to be selling things at all," said Lexeter sharply. "Never mind that now. You may keep whatever you've got."

He had intended crossing directly over the hill, but it was the hour at which every one leaves the Pincian. The narrow sidewalk was crowded with people on their way home to dinner, strangers and Italians, black-gowned priests in couples, loudly chattering files of lads in the scarlet robes of the German College, and heavy nurses in Albanese costume, dragging small wailing infants by the hand.

Lexeter took the first short cut out of all this con-



fusion. He walked on, not caring very much where he went. At one moment he stood still and struck his stick sharply down upon the ground. "So that is over," he said aloud. And then again he laughed and looked about him. But there was no one there to overhear the words; he was quite alone. And again the sentiment of a deep lassitude possessed him. He thought only languidly of Barbara. His mind wandered away from her; his attention drifting aimlessly about, catching upon such small details as the position of a statue or the color of green leaves against the sky. He was in that state of being in which apathy is consciously a mere preface to suffering; and Sorrow may have her voice, Despair his own exceeding bitter cry, but Misery is dumb. At that moment Lexeter was most miserable.

He walked on until he reached the spot where they had paused before the bust of Leopardi. There was still light enough in the sky to throw the whitehooded figure into pale relief. Lexeter stopped here. He stood still, looking at the marble face in the shadow with a curious feeling of comradeship. "And you, too, you experienced this," he thought. He glanced at the bench in front of him. He remembered a morning, long ago, when here at this very spot he had met a young girl on her way to her first tryst with her lover. And certain old words came back to him: —

O natura, o natura,  
Perchè non rendi poi  
Quel che prometti allor ?

In the twilight the bitter immutable mouth of the dead poet seemed to smile with implacable negation from its forgotten corner among the clustering leaves of a new spring.

But when at last he wandered out from among these trees the changed look of the world was fairly enough to startle one. For behind St. Peter's, where the sun had set, the light was like a shining silver flame. The horizon was the color of the heart of a rose ; and away to the east, away across the waste of the Campagna, the purple shadows were slowly darkening on the hills.

He walked over to the farther esplanade and looked down. Already a pale, thin mist was creeping over the houses. The city lay at his feet, gray and fawn-colored, like some heap of huddled shells. Everything was in half-tints, and over against him rose the dim rounded darkness of the dome. The wind blew past him in soft pulsations like a breath — "airs from the Eden of youth." The serene silence of the limpid bending sky struck upon the senses like the vast primeval caress of a mother-world.

Lexeter took off his hat with a feeling of relief. There was no one left here but himself. He leaned against the balustrade ; he looked down at the creeping mists drawing nearer. The penetrating odor of the violets he wore in his coat reached him from time to time, burdened with all the clinging sadness of regretful memory.

And these are some of the things which he remembered.

## CHAPTER I.

IT was at the charity ball at the Campidoglio that Barbara Floyd first met the man she was to marry. It was indeed a memorable evening to her, even in other ways than this. For one thing, it was her first official introduction into Anglo-Roman society — into any society. And it is quite possible that there may have been some slight trepidation underlying her usual self-possessed manner as she stood, ready-dressed, before the dim old-fashioned swinging-mirror in her own room. She contemplated the tall slender reflection dressed all in white quite gravely and even anxiously for a minute or two, and then an amused look began to steal into the clear, candid eyes.

"I wonder if I shall do? If Octave will approve of me?" she said lightly.

At that moment there came a knock at the door.

"Come in," the young girl answered, without turning her head. "And have you come to take a look at me, Margherita?" she went on, addressing the thick, broad-chested reflection which joined hers in the glass. "And is the carriage waiting?"

"Miss Octave was not to call for you before ten o'clock," the old woman answered in Italian. "And, indeed, it is a good sight to see you dressed for a ball

like other young ladies, Miss Barbara. I was telling the buttermilk man about it only this morning, when I went in to see about the eggs for the signore's breakfast. And come in at what hour you like, I said, it is always the same; there sits my young lady at her books, and read — read — read! And if it is a question of a walk, when was it ever: 'Margherita, we will go for a turn on the Corso;' or, 'Margherita, the sun is shining, let us go and hear the music on the Pincio and see all the fine dresses?' No! What I hear is: 'Margherita! to-day I shall walk to the gate,' or 'to the galleries,' or 'to the blessed Vatican,' where the Holy Father lives, and there is nothing to look at but the English foreigners counting up the statues to see if they are all put down in the little red books; and not a young man in the house from one Carnival to the next! Madonna mia! we thought of other things when I was a girl, I said. And the signore with his head in the air, and always thinking of his pictures — "

"Come here and fasten in these flowers for me, you silly old woman," said Barbara good-naturedly. "Now, look here, Margherita, I am going to give you a piece of advice. The next time you go in to buy your groceries, and the pizzicaruolo asks after me, or the pizzicaruolo's wife begins to gossip — "

"Ah, Holy Virgin! but it will be a long time before the poor woman has a word to say for herself again, the saints be with her! And have you not heard the news, Miss Barbara? But, indeed, how should you ever hear of anything! And it was last

night that the pizzicaruolo came home from the drinking-shop where he had been having a glass with a friend or two, poor man ! And they had been talking as men will ; so when Giacomo came home and his wife was not there, the drink began to go to his head, *poveretto* ! and he took his knife and waited behind the door. And when she came in — perhaps he did not mean really to give her a cut, and perhaps the wine had made his hand heavy — and then, seeing the blood — ”

The girl turned pale. She put out her hand suddenly and caught at the frame of the mirror. “Is the woman dead ?” she asked in a very low voice.

“ *Dio ce ne guardi !* ”

Margherita shrugged her handsome shoulders until the long gold earrings swung against her cheek. “They have taken her to the hospital of the Consolazione. And as for him, poor fellow ! what would you have ? It was all jealousy. Not a bit of malice in it — all pure jealousy. We are not like you others, Miss Barbara, when a passion takes us, we Italians ! *Basta !* I have seen them of all colors when I was a girl in Genzano. There was my own brother, now. He was killed in a quarrel at fair-time. That was under the old government, and they took the man who stabbed him and sent him to the galleys. Very well. And then my father bought himself a new knife and waited. Those were the good old days when prisoners were sure of their pardon — prisoners who never spoke against the Holy Virgin or the Government. And there is a proverb which says ‘Ten

words are not worth one blow.' And it is a very good proverb, that; there are crosses all along the road to show what it means. I have heard my father say that many a time — good old man; he was always so fond of his children. Well, as I was telling you, signorina, one day — perhaps it was a year later — one morning when my father was in his shop —

But by this time the girl had begun to recover herself. The color came back to her lips. Only there was a great sadness still in her eyes as she spoke. "I will not hear the end of that story," she said, speaking very seriously; "and, Margherita, tomorrow we shall go to the Consolazione, you and I. And you will see that there is something ready."

"Very well," the old woman said shortly. She had been kneeling down to make sure of the fastening of the white satin rosette on her young mistress's shoe; but now she rose up, folding her arms across her ample bosom. "Very well," she said, in rather an offended manner; "but it is glad I am to see you going out to enjoy yourself, Miss Barbara, with something better than my old stories. And glad enough I am that Miss Octave has come back. And will you have on your cloak now, Miss Barbara, before you go to the studio? The signore is waiting to see you. He sent me to tell you so."

"Papa kept waiting all this time!"

She gathered the soft white folds of her dress in a heap around her, and went quickly out of the room. There was no light in the large low-ceilinged parlor, but the moon was shining in at the windows. She

passed lightly and rapidly through that room and the next, and down a narrow passage, lit by a swinging lamp. At first there was no answer to her timid rap. She knocked again.

"Come in, Barbara," a voice answered. She opened the door and went in.

It was not a cold night, but Mr. Floyd was standing with his hands behind his back, staring at the fire. He turned round and looked up at his daughter's entrance. They called this place the studio, but it was really nothing but a small and rather crowded room. The air was overheated and smelt of paint and of old leather. And indeed this was little matter for wonder, for the place was full of every kind of non-descript lumber. The walls were covered with tattered and dingy canvases. There were easels standing about with pictures on them in every stage of incompleteness. The table was littered with loose papers and old books, and long rows of leather-covered volumes stood ranged side by side upon the floor. There was a book open now upon the mantelpiece among the dusty bottles, but Mr. Floyd had not been reading.

"So you are all ready for your ball?" he said slowly, looking a little curiously at this white apparition. And then, after a pause: "You are looking very well, Barbara."

"Yes, papa," the girl said shyly.

But somehow he did not look as if he had sent for her merely to compliment her about her dress.

"Yes, you are looking very well — very well," he repeated slowly.

He was a small rather thick-set man, fully half a head shorter than his daughter. His face was clean-shaved ; he wore neither beard nor mustache. His eyes were large, like hers, but of the lightest shade of blue ; and, as his face was also large and flat, and very much darkened and reddened by the sun, these keen pale eyes were the first thing you noticed about him. He turned round now, and suddenly and vigorously attacked the fire.

"If you are all ready to go, you have no jewels to wear," he said.

His daughter looked at him with some astonishment.

"Any jewels, papa?" She was hardly sure of what he said, he was making so much noise with the fire-irons. "Why, I have none. I don't want them ; I —"

The log of wood snapped suddenly across in the middle, and the ashes were scattered all over the hearth.

"Let me do that for you," she said.

"Go away, Barbara. Take care ! you will only ruin your dress," her father answered rather sharply.

He threw down the brush he was holding, went over to the table, and began to rummage among his papers.

"There ; you may have that ; take it away. It is yours, and everything in it," he said without looking up. He pushed a small sandal-wood box towards her. The lock was evidently broken. It had been forced open at some time, and the cover was secured



by a bit of black ribbon. He drew a chair up to the table, sat down, and opened a book. It was certainly a curious way of making a present.

But perhaps the manner in which she accepted it was more curious still. For there was nothing in her face of the pleased surprise of a girl over a sudden windfall of new ornaments. Presently she drew nearer to the table. She rested both hands upon it.

"Papa," she said.

He kept his head bent down.

"There, child, take it and go. I am busy. Can't you see that I am busy?" he asked fretfully.

But the hand which was holding his book was not so steady as usual. He got up again and went and stood before the fire. "The diamonds in there are family jewels," he said suddenly; "the Floyds have always had them. My mother wore them at her wedding; so did — It — it has always been the custom in the family for years. You will be careful of them, Barbara. As for the rest of the things —"

He glanced sideways at his daughter, and then looked down again at the fire, and fell to biting his nails. "You won't find anything else there of much intrinsic value, I imagine," he said with a short laugh.

She came up close beside him rather timidly and laid her arm across his bent shoulders without speaking. She stood so for nearly a minute, without his moving or giving any sign of being conscious of her presence. At last she said in her soft full voice, —

"I am so sorry you should have pained yourself to give me these."

She would have said more but that something seemed to rise up in her throat which made her voice tremble, and warned her to be brief. Her father could not endure crying. He showed his usual dislike to scenes now by the manner in which he again requested her to leave him.

"I have some work — important work — to do," he said a little impatiently. But when she bent down to kiss him he did not make any objection to it; on the contrary, he put up his hand and patted her cheek. It was burning hot.

"There, there; run along, child. Go to your ball and enjoy yourself. And, Barbara, you will not forget to give Mrs. Damon my compliments and best thanks for her kindness in taking charge of you. I shall do myself the honor of calling upon her tomorrow to thank her in person."

But in spite of this new gentleness, when his daughter had gone, he lost no time in making fast his door. He turned the key in the lock with a sharp snap — Barbara could hear it, going down the passage — and went back to his old place before the fire.

He stood there a long while — a short middle-aged figure — still biting his finger-nails angrily, and staring down at the glowing bed of coals which were slowly turning to white ashes. But what is this picture he is continually seeing there, — the small bright country church full of the sunshine of some far-off summer morning, and all about him a crowd of familiar and friendly faces? And who is this girl who stands be-

side him, with a gleam of diamonds about her white throat, and diamond stars in the marriage veil which covers her beautiful hair ?

At that moment Barbara was looking at those very diamonds. She had gone back to the empty drawing-room; there was a lamp lighted there now. She placed her box upon the table and unfastened the knotted ribbon; the lid fell off its broken hinges with a jar. As her father had said, it was a motley collection of trinkets. The diamonds were in a case by themselves; she glanced at them rather carelessly and pushed them to one side. There was a quantity of loose coral beads rolling about, the thread which bound them had been snapped in two; the fine cameo bracelet she next took up had lost its clasp. The things seemed all to have been thrown in together hastily and left. But quite at the bottom of the box, among the loose beads, she came upon something which suddenly made her heart beat faster and brought quick tears to her eyes. It was merely a thin old-fashioned locket with a glass face. On the back were engraved some initials and a date, and under the glass was a soft fair lock of hair, — the hair of a very little child.

She touched it with the gentlest, the most indescribable emotion. Nothing else had ever given her this same feeling of nearness to the mother she had never known. A whole experience of loving companionship seemed revealed to her by the sight of this carefully cherished remembrance of her own babyhood. This was something her mother had done,

with her own hands, in the tenderness of her love and pride. And in what far-off day had this small pale curl been treasured, and why?

"O mamma, mamma!" the girl said passionately, with trembling lips.

She swept everything else back into its place and stood looking at this which she held in her hand. She still kept the bit of black ribbon between her fingers. It fell against her white ball-dress like a visible sign of the sorrow which must always make a silent difference between her experience and that of others. But she was not thinking of this.

It was characteristic of Barbara that at this moment, with her mother's whole history brought freshly before her, all the power of her imagination should go out in an idealizing attempt to realize the lost love of which here was the evident token. The more obvious personal and social consequences of that loss failed to impress her, except as they affected her father. And this was probably even more the result of temperament than of ignorance. She had spent too much of her young life in boarding-schools, where a high moral standard is one of the things specified in the prospectus, to make it probable that this indifference to lower calculations should be the result of education.

But now the door opened.

"Miss Octave is there. The carriage is waiting," said Margherita, from the outside. She stood still, with her hands rolled up in her apron, watching her young mistress gathering together her cloak and hand-

kerchief and gloves. But when she saw the girl pass by her and go to the door without speaking, and still with that preoccupied look on her face: "And are you not going to give me something to carry down for you, Miss Barbara?" the old woman asked reproachfully.

She seized upon the lamp, and was especially careful of Barbara's dress in passing the door.

"*Audiamo!* Courage, Miss Barbara! It is not to confession you are going, but to a ball. I am a stupid old woman, with my stories. And you will not be leaving the key with the porter, for I shall sit up for you until you come home," she said penitently, half-way down the stair.

"Sit up for me? Nonsense! Go to bed and to sleep as quickly as you can," the girl said, in a kindly, absent sort of way. She was looking back and upwards, so that the light fell full upon her face and on her white dress, making a luminous spot against the dusky background of the dark old palace stair.

The carriage was waiting in the courtyard at the foot of these steps. There was some one standing in the moonlight, beside the open door, who took off his hat as she passed him.

"Well, Barbara dear — at last!" said Octave, bending forward with a soft rustle, and putting out a small tightly gloved hand. And then a place was made for her beside Mrs. Damon, and Octave leaned forward again and held up a smooth cheek to be kissed.

"I am sure I am very sorry if we have kept you waiting, Barbara —"

"Nonsense, mamma! as if Barbara ever expected me to be punctual! Punctuality is a soldier's vice — do you hear, Count Lalli? And are you going to stand there all night with that door open? Do get in. I am freezing to death," said Miss Damon, with an affected shiver of her pretty shoulders.

"A thousand pardons, mademoiselle!"

"I don't think you know my friend, Miss Floyd? Count Cesco Lalli, Barbara. As for mamma, she never thinks of introducing anybody. She would let the poor man sit there all the evening. Oh, he does n't speak English," said Octave carelessly. "You can say what you like. And speaking of liking, what do you think of the way my hair is done?" She bent forward a little so that the light of the street lamp they were passing might shine upon her dark curly head. "Fillets, you know. The Greek sort of thing. So you think it is becoming?"

"Everything you do is becoming," said Barbara, looking affectionately at her.

Octave impressed her more than ever to-night like some delightful, inexplicable inhabitant of another sphere, — a sheltered world, in which there entered no questionings, no perplexity, no pressure on account of other people's mistakes, but where life meant chiefly the certitude of being charming, and the delight of being petted in consequence. There was not a year's difference in their age, but Barbara always thought of herself as immeasurably the elder. She had that sympathetic and imaginative faculty of entering into other existences which makes the standard of actual

years a merely conventional formula. This is not a faculty which belongs to happy lives. She was fond of Octave with that sort of tenderness which makes no demand upon companionship other than the mere comradeship of agreeable presence. Octave, on the other hand, was in the habit of saying "Barbara is so clever;" meaning by that chiefly that Barbara was addicted to reading books which had no story in them, would go of her own impulse to picture-galleries or to listen to classical music, and actually enjoyed talking to friends of her father's, quite old men, who would go on speaking about Cavour's policy, or the new project for draining the Campagna, without the slightest apparent recognition of her presence or presumable interests.

"I never can—I never shall imagine what it is you care about in those people," Octave had said to her one day not long before. "Now that horrible Herr Müller with his spectacles, talking about the proportions of the human figure as calculated by the comparative tablet in the temple at Kom Ombos! What *is* the temple at Kom Ombos? And I don't think it is nice in a man of his age, who takes snuff; to be talking about the proportions of the human figure. It all comes from your going to those horrid statues at the Vatican, Barbara. I never could see that the Greeks had such particularly good figures myself. And then that Monsieur Simon—"

"Well, what is the matter with poor Monsieur Simon's figure?"

"Oh, he's horrid!" said Octave comprehensively, arching her eyebrows.

"He was in Lyons in '51. He was on the barricades."

"Perhaps that is where he lost all his pocket-handkerchiefs?"

"Sometimes when he is here I look at him and try to imagine the things he has seen. Octave, I wish you would read '*Les Misérables*.' Fancy," said Barbara, letting her work fall on her knee and leaning forward with slowly brightening eyes, "fancy just the handful of men there against all the world, and fighting for what they know could never come for them or even in their own time; dying just to show that there are things in life worth dying for."

"Oh," said Octave coolly, "but you see it was n't so bad as that. People always exaggerate. Look at Monsieur Simon; *he* escaped. And I don't see that a man who talks through his nose is any less unpleasant because he is a hero, Barbara. After all, it is the daily habits that one cares about. If one must be doing things all the time, at least I should rather be doing them while I was young, like Cesco Lalli. He was in the Papal Zouaves, you know, until last year, and they gave him that medal for doing something or other—defending a bridge against a company of Garibaldi's troops with only ten men, while General Lamoricière got away with his staff. He had his shoulder cut open with a sabre, and all his men were shot but two. But at any rate it was not so stupid as building barricades," said Octave calmly, getting up and strolling over to the looking-glass. "And at all events Lalli does n't take snuff," she



added, turning about and showing a rose-pink dimple in either cheek.

And Barbara laughed. It was the way in which their discussions commonly ended.

"I shall introduce Count Lalli to you. Only I'm afraid there is no chance for him, poor fellow! He is too handsome; you would never admire him," Octave had said with pretended melancholy.

All this had taken place some two or three days before. To-night, in the carriage, Barbara seemed entirely to have forgotten her supposed curiosity.

She leaned back in her corner and was silent. Her eyes were fixed on the window, but the dark, narrow streets through which they were rattling seemed alike unfamiliar. They passed the Roman Forum; at any other moment she would surely have roused herself to look at this, but now the still moon-whitened columns and archways affected her merely as a fantastic, meaningless background to the stress of intense personal feeling which was forcing itself upon her. She had fastened her mother's locket in her dress, and now she put up her fingers to feel for it.

"Why, Barbara, what are you thinking of? You have not even put on your gloves," said Octave with dismay.

Barbara started. "I had quite forgotten," she said, a little confusedly.

And then Count Lalli spoke for the first time.

"Will you allow me?"

He had drawn off his own gloves, and held her wrist lightly between his fingers as he fastened the long gauntlets with the other hand. He secured the last button as they drew up before the palace gate.

"Thank you. Oh, that will do perfectly. Thanks," said Barbara, a trifle impatiently. And then in getting out of the carriage she had to give him her hand.

They went into the cloak-room together. "I hope I am all right, I'm sure. It is impossible to see anything of one's self in such a crowd," Mrs. Damon remarked plaintively, putting up her hand to her hair. It was not curly wavy hair like Octave's, but smooth and dark. They each had the same clear brown eyes, the same long throat, and there was a striking likeness in the carriage of the small round head; only in the mother's case there were some deep, and apparently quite irrelevant, lines about the temples, and her skin had lost that look of delicate rosy transparency which was one of Octave's greatest charms. Next to her daughter, Mrs. Damon looked not unlike a wax flower. "I'm so glad we brought a gentleman. I told you what a crowd there would be, Octave."

She put her hand on Count Lalli's arm.

"I hope the princess has not yet gone, I'm sure. Keep as close to me as you can."

The two girls followed her into the ball-room.

"Ah, there is Mr. Hardinge talking to Clifford Dix. We are sure of partners as soon as they see us, Barbara. Not that one can even think of dancing in this crowd. But where is mamma going? Ah, Mr. Dix,

how are you? You are the very person I want. You know Miss Floyd, don't you? Barbara, let me introduce Mr. Dix. He can tell you who everybody is in the room. I am afraid of him myself. He writes novels," said Octave, showing all her dimples as she spoke.

"I call this cruel, Miss Damon."

"Oh, I prefer talking to Mr. Hardinge. He adapts his conversation to my capacity," she said, moving away and turning her long throat to look at him over her shoulder. Barbara smiled involuntarily, watching her, Octave's prettiness being of that softly youthful type which is perpetually surprising one with the familiar and ever-fresh surprise of new flowers and returning springs.

## CHAPTER II.

"YOUR friend seems to interest you," Mr. Dix remarked, after waiting a moment.

"Yes ; you see she is my friend."

"But that is precisely the thing which makes your interest surprising, don't you see?" Mr. Dix continued in rather a languid tone.

He was not in the habit of manufacturing conversation for the benefit of every girl who was thrown in his way. He was a man consciously capable of extremely refined pleasures, which he afterwards described with curious nicety of epithet. His mind was kept anxiously on the alert for the most appropriate emotions. His critics accused him sometimes of considering existence like a series of brilliant magazine articles, and contributing his own share with perhaps too vivid a realization of clear-cut impression and epigram. But these were probably the same people who complained that he wrote like a man who examined the passions through an eyeglass. His books were impartially international. He was carefully cultivated ; he had spent all his life in examining great things ; and, in point of fact, he was certainly quite unerring in his accuracy as to those differentiating details of dress, card-leaving, and speech which

are the final cause of American civilization. He was invariably just in his strictures. He had a social reputation of being very severe. He had indeed at various times made several cutting remarks upon the American continent; but in commenting upon this fact the best people always added, "But he has been so much abroad, you know."

He was silent for a moment, and then, "Do you dance, Miss Floyd?" he asked.

"Sometimes."

"Are you fond of dancing?"

"Very."

"You are not enthusiastic. I asked the same question of a girl at the English Embassy last night, and she told me she considered dancing quite too awfully jolly. But then she admitted that she was too awfully particularly devoted to Strauss."

"Do you think she could possibly have imagined she was 'adapting her conversation'?" said Barbara, looking at him with a sudden smile.

Her full direct glance was as unconscious as the look of a handsome boy. It amused him; it pleased him on reflection.

"Have you been out very much? I mean, is this your first season?" he asked. He spoke rather quicker and with much more friendliness of manner.

"It is my first ball. Mrs. Damon was so kind about it. I came with Octave. My father is busy; he does not care for society," said Barbara simply.

"I see," a dim recollection of some story connected with the name of Floyd coming back to him. "Shall

we not have a turn before the music stops?" he said.

At that moment the doors of the next saloon were thrown open; there was a general rising and rustling of dresses, and a blond young woman all in white walked rapidly in, followed by several ladies of the Court. The crowd parted before them, leaving an empty space.

"Uncommonly well the princess is looking to-night," said Mr. Dix approvingly. As he spoke the lady in question dropped her fan, there was a general rush forward, but a young man who had stepped out of the crowd was the first to touch it. He presented it to her with a low bow. He drew back again and resumed his position against the wall.

"Who is that man, do you know? I must have seen him somewhere. Good-looking fellow too. He folds his arms like the hero of a French novel."

"Oh," said Barbara, turning her eyes in that direction. "I know who he is. He came with us to-night. His name is Count Lalli."

"A Roman?"

"I don't know. I suppose so. He was in the Papal Zouaves, Octave told me."

"Ah, that accounts. But the *genre* is antiquated. It is the *jeune premier* of five years ago," said Dix indifferently, dropping his eyeglass. "Shall we not have a turn?"

But the next time they stopped dancing Mr. Dix mentioned him again.

"I have made a discovery. Your friend with the

eyes is watching us," he said. "Observe that I say 'us,' and not you, Miss Floyd. I flatter myself that this is generous, particularly at this moment when he is approaching us with evident designs of tearing you away."

"How very absurd," said Barbara lightly, her face still bright with her childlike pleasure in the dancing.

Octave passed on the arm of a gentleman and nodded to them. The lights, the measured pulsing of the music, the very sense and movement of the crowd were working upon Barbara's quickly touched sympathies. A perfectly new desire for amusement was waking in her. She turned to Lalli when he approached her with the same confident smile.

"I am sent by Madame Damon to beg you not to engage yourself for the cotillon, signorina," he began, speaking in Italian and with an air of great deference. He glanced at her partner. "Madame Damon is sitting in the next room, where it is cooler —"

"Did she ask you to bring me to her? Oh, thanks," said Barbara carelessly, putting her hand on his arm.

They walked half-way down the long hall without speaking, then Lalli asked in a low voice, and bending his head towards her, "Are you happy to-night?"

"Very," said Barbara, looking up with a slight surprise.

Their eyes met, and for some inexplicable reason

the girl felt suddenly embarrassed. In an instant she had grown conscious of herself, of her hands, of the way she was standing, of the very dress she wore. She looked away with a perceptible effort.

"I do not see Mrs. Damon," she said.

"No. If you are happy now you were not happy in the carriage, I knew that. I know your face so well. I knew it when I saw you coming down those steps, all in white, with the light shining on your face; I said to myself, 'There is something troubling her to-night.'"

"But, Count Lalli —"

"Ah," he said, keeping his eyes fixed upon her, and in the same low voice, "I could tell you things which would astonish you. I could tell you where you have been every day for the last month. Yesterday you drove out with Miss Damon; on Thursday you were in St. John Lateran at vespers. You had with you an old woman whom you called Margherita. You stayed for the benediction. You wore a dark green dress trimmed with fur, and there was fur and something shining — it looked like steel — on your hat. As you were coming out you stopped to speak to an old lady."

"But — but this is absurd!" said Barbara, flushing and feeling bewildered. It seemed to her that she was angry as well.

"Is it true or not?"

"I cannot see what possible interest —"

"It is true then?"

She dropped his arm and threw back her head a



little, and looked at him rather proudly. "Any one might have seen me coming out of church," she said. But it is impossible to say why she should have selected this precise moment to remember the story Octave had told her about this man. There was a scrap of red ribbon in his button-hole. Was that the ribbon of the medal he had won? He was so tall and well set up. How must he have looked, standing at the head of his men, defending the narrow bridge? He had seen curious things to be so preoccupied with the small movements of a girl's daily life.

She opened her fan and shut it.

"If Mrs. Damon —"

"I will go and look for Mrs. Damon, if you wish me to," he said instantly. "If I can find a place to leave you." He looked about him with a wide, keen glance which seemed to take in every face in the room. "There should be a window-seat behind that scarlet curtain," he said.

And there was a seat. The window looked out upon the low wide stairway of the Capitol. The moon was shining on the silent square. It was shining on the statue of Marcus Aurelius. It was after midnight. The wind was hushed. Not a shadow moved. Only the dead emperor was mounting guard over his sleeping city, in his old free familiar companionship with the night and the changeless stars.

She sat down and turned her face to the window with a sudden revulsion of mood.

"Ah," she said softly, with a quick sigh of pleasure, "how beautiful that is!"

Lalli waited a minute. She had quite forgotten he was to leave her. He waited with the folds of the curtain in his hand. He gave another quick searching glance around him. He let the curtain fall; he stepped into the recess; he came and stood silently beside her.

"It is quiet enough now. But do you know the last time I was here, Miss Floyd?" he said. "It was a year ago in September—a year and five months ago. We had been all the morning at the Porta Pia. Later, I was sent down here with despatches. The Italian troops were entering; my colonel kept me here. You cannot imagine what it is like to be in the Campidoglio again. I remember this room," he said, and stopped abruptly. Barbara turned her head and looked at him. "Do you see that line of light beyond the statue? between the two lamps? We made a barricade of mattresses just there; and we waited. At every instant the cannon were firing; at each gun a piece of the city wall—of the walls of our city—of our Rome—was falling. And they made us wait. They told us to be patient. And we were young men, Miss Floyd, and soldiers, and this was our city they were taking. Oh yes," he said, and he laughed, and there was a curious look on his face as he said it; "oh yes, we were very patient."

But she was paying very little attention to his appearance. She had taken off her gloves. She was bending forward with parted lips. The moonlight fell full upon her face.

"Go on," she said.

"Oh," he said sullenly, "what is the use? You were here. You know what happened. We waited; we waited until the troops came. I climbed up there on that statue and looked over. There were a hundred of us at least. We had ammunition, and the square was packed full. There were women there — to see us surrender; and children, who were being taught to laugh. If I had had my way," the young man said, his face darkening suddenly, "they should have been taught to jeer at us. Only I think not many of them would have gone home."

Barbara clasped her hands together; her eyes moved uneasily. "Please do not say a thing like that."

"Why not? They said we were frightened." He bit his lip and stared gloomily out of the window. "After all," he said, turning to her suddenly and speaking in French, "*C'était de la canaille, tout ça*. It was the populace who had come to see their masters, the gentlemen, surrender."

"It was liberty coming into Italy," the girl said, looking at him fearlessly, "Count Lalli — But everything seems so difficult," she said. "There was our own war at home; that was ten years ago. I was ten years old when it began. I remember it as if it were yesterday. They sent me away from home. We are Southerners, you know; and we were in the wrong, just as you were here. We were fighting against other people's rights. It was all wrong; and yet when you remember how the people you care the most for have suffered for it — It is so difficult to see how things are right when they hurt people you care about."

"*Væ victis*. And there is one thing left for us now, and that is silence," said Lalli rather bitterly, folding his arms and looking down. He had not understood very much of what she was saying. Possibly his ideas may have been somewhat vague on the subject of the American Civil War. "After all, it is something to be silent," he said, turning his dark melancholy eyes upon Barbara, and smiling at her. He looked very noble as he said it.

Another waltz had begun.

"I wish I could ask you to dance," said Lalli; "but since I was hurt—" He touched his shoulder.

"Oh," she said eagerly, "I don't want to dance. I should never have imagined you would dance—here." She hesitated. "Do you know—I wonder a little," she said shyly, "I wonder at your coming here at all—an old soldier of the Pope. It is very fine to be an Italian like that—to love Italy better than one's own personal pride."

There was nothing in Lalli's past experiences—and he was not a man wanting in experience—there was nothing to prevent his making a mistake here.

"I knew that you were coming. I came because I wanted to see you," he said impressively.

Barbara flushed a little and drew back. It did not need the sudden stiffness in her manner, nor the tone of her voice as she said, "I beg your pardon. I thought we were speaking seriously," to show him that he had miscalculated the effect of his words. He was not a man accustomed to making such blunders. But here was something new. And there was

something attractive too about this girl who talked to you at a ball as if you and she were fellow-students in some musty class-room ; who turned red and white over old stories of men fighting ; and looked as calmly at you, with those large clear candid eyes of hers, as if she were — your younger brother ! He glanced at Barbara's ungloved hand which was lying upon her lap. Perhaps the thought crossed his mind at that moment that it would be pleasant to feel the shy touch of that delicate hand seeking his. He belonged to a school whose creeds were very simple. And then the first part of this evening had been dull — worse than that, he had been overlooked. In interfering to take Barbara away from her partner — Barbara, who had never once noticed him in the carriage — he had enjoyed the assertion of his claim to a degree which would somewhat have astonished that gentleman. But with all these mingled motives for speaking there was hardly an appreciable pause before he answered, —

“You would have a right to be angry with me if that were simply an impertinent compliment. It is nothing of the kind.” He hesitated an instant. The women he had known were *not* averse to compliments. “Things — everything around me has changed of late,” he said abruptly. “A year ago I was an officer in the finest service in the world. We defended the Church. Life was opening out in every direction before me. I was young, sure of promotion,” he glanced quickly down at the girl's averted profile, “and I was madly in love,” he said. “Now —

You are looking at those old steps, Miss Floyd; but let me tell you it is not only our ancestors who have dragged their prisoners to their triumphs on the Capitol."

"But surely—surely you might have taken service again," she suggested rather timidly.

"Yes; I could have taken service under the orders of men who had insulted us. I might have allowed some little Piedmontese farmer to give me orders—to me, a Roman! I had a religion, Miss Floyd, and they have defamed it. I had a sovereign, and they have put him in prison. You may call that liberty if you like; I call it the desecration of all I have ever believed in; of what I learned as a child—of what—Basta! I should ask your pardon for wearying you with my poor affairs," he said. He folded his arms and stood leaning against the wall with his gaze moodily fixed upon the ground. But he was very well aware of the change which had come over the expression of her face. His plastic southern temperament was already becoming responsive to the charm of this new influence. Above all things he wanted to make her lean forward and look up at him again with that clear direct glance, as she had looked when he was telling her about the taking of the town. There would be something decidedly satisfactory in receiving such a look for one's own merits. And there was really no insincerity worth speaking of in this account of his situation. The accidents of our own lives naturally impress us as striking and picturesque, as the smallest feature will

seem full of interest in limited and much-studied landscapes. Probably there is no person more appreciative of small natural beauties than the owner of a perfectly flat tract of land. There is many an artificial mound in a Dutch burgomaster's garden which has excited more pride of possession than the Alps. It seemed to Lalli quite simple that Barbara should be impressed by the importance of these revelations.

"And then," he went on presently as if speaking to himself, "when I have lived to see the end of everything—of love, and religion, and ambition—when I am tired of life and of all it does not bring me, I see a face which seems to mean something to me among all the other indifferent, unmeaning faces. I meet a privileged being—*un essere privilegiato della vita*—and for one moment I forget the forms of ceremony. I say to myself: Here is some one who will let you speak to her frankly, from your inward self, who will understand your dreams, your disappointments; who will give you courage to go on living by the mere fact of letting you know her, and who, some day perhaps, will say to you, The whole world abandoned you, but I never abandoned you. And there is my hand, and you may take it safely. It is the hand of a friend."

He glanced at Barbara's flushed and downcast face.

"*Væ victis!* I have said it before and I say it again. I have made a mistake. It shall be the last. And I beg your pardon, mademoiselle."

"Oh," said Barbara impulsively, in her full tender voice, "if I thought that really—if I were sure it made any real difference —"

Something curious happened just then. They were standing, as I have said, in the recess of a window. The curtain which Lalli had dropped had been pushed to one side by the dancers, but now as the music stopped stray couples began promenading up and down. The first who passed glanced curiously in at the occupant of the window-seat, but before the next two rejoined them—and indeed these were Octave in a flutter of rose-colored ribbons and Mr. Dix—before these two passed by, Lalli had pushed the heavy folds together carelessly with his foot so that only he himself could be seen, Barbara was entirely hidden behind the crimson drapery. It was a scientific little manœuvre, and very well executed. He turned complacently to Barbara for approval. But it was evident from her unconscious look that she had noticed nothing; indeed, her whole mind was possessed with a vivid imaginative pity before the spectacle of this baffled life. The smile vanished instantly from his features.

"You simply could never know what your friendship would be to me," he said beseechingly. "No woman has ever cared for me in that way—since my mother died."

"Ah—yes!" said Barbara, clasping her hands and looking at him. All the emotions which had made this evening memorable seemed to rush together and centre on this point. They had had this great expe-



rience in common. It never occurred to her to remember to what widely different results the same experience may lead in diverging natures. She looked at Lalli: perhaps one would need to be a girl of twenty again to realize how thoroughly she believed in him.

They said very little more to each other after that. He had gained his point, and was satisfied. And indeed it was not more than a few minutes before Octave came up and joined them. She was looking radiant.

"I want to introduce Mr. Hardinge to you, Barbara. And Mr. Lexeter," she said.

The two gentlemen bowed.

"The princess is gone. Mamma thinks we had better not stay for the cotillon. Do you mind, dear? Have you been dancing much?" Miss Damon asked.

She looked rather sharply at Lalli's impassive countenance when Barbara answered she had not been waltzing. Otherwise she made no comment.

"People are going already," she said carelessly. "Clifford Dix left you his compliments. He seemed quite cut up by your leaving him. He said he never yet had understood what Italians found to talk about to American girls. I promised I would ask you. Nonsense, Barbara! I told you of it before. He does n't understand a word of English. Oh, Mr. Lexeter! You know people. Who is that man over there — the tall man with curls? There, he is speaking to that lady in black."

"That man?" said Lexeter. "He is an Englishman. His name is Perkins — Archibald Douglas Perkins. I've seen his card. I wonder you don't know him, Miss Damon. He is an authority on all the fine arts, including the lost art of selling pictures. Did I tell you he painted? Oh yes, he is a professional painter. He is very successful, they tell me. But I wouldn't give much for his character, if his pictures are the least of his crimes."

"I did not know he was an artist."

"There ought to be another word invented," remarked Mr. Hardinge lazily; "something to describe the fellows who pursue their Art, as they call it, for the sole sake of picking her pockets."

"Ah," said Octave, smiling and shaking her head; "you are not in a kind temper to-night."

"This morning, if you please, Miss Damon. It is half past two by my watch — which is Lexeter's watch, by the way; and it is always slow."

Count Lalli had been following the pantomime attentively.

"*Gid*," he said, taking out his watch and looking at it; "after half past two."

"Well, we will hope mamma has been enjoying the evening," said Octave rather carelessly.

They all came out of the cloak-room together to look for the carriage, and Barbara had taken Mr. Hardinge's arm. He shook hands with her in quite a friendly manner at the door.

"There is something well-bred and simple about that friend of Miss Damon's; she pleased me," he

remarked confidentially to Lexeter, as they paused to light their cigars before starting down the hill.

"She has a fine face, certainly—a very impassioned face," the elder man said slowly. He pulled up the collar of his ulster about his ears.

"So she pleased you, you young pasha," he repeated, looking at the lad with an odd ironical smile. "But let me tell you that there won't be many things which will have it left in their power to please or to displease you either, my boy, if you persist much longer in walking about Rome at night in a greatcoat of the thickness of a sheet of letter-paper. There is such an action possible as making use of a little common sense, Hardinge. Let me recommend the fact to your notice."

"Oh," said Hardinge carelessly, "nothing ever hurts me. Come on."

He thrust his hands in his pockets, and they started down the hill together in the moonlight. The older man walked as if he were slightly lame.

Meanwhile Mrs. Damon's carriage was driving home in an opposite direction, rattling past the still solitary-looking ruins—solitary in the midst of all the crowding alien life, and down dark silent streets. The heavy doors of the Palazzo del Governo Vecchio were made fast. Lalli sprang out and knocked. The hollow vibration sounded far down the street and the horses started at it.

"The porter must be asleep," said Octave idly, after waiting a moment.

"Let me get out. Mrs. Damon will be catching

cold with that open door," said Barbara. "Are you tired, Mrs. Damon? You have been so very kind." She stooped and pressed her lips against Octave's smooth cheek. "I shall see you again to-morrow, dear."

Lalli knocked a second time.

"I hear some one coming," he said.

He stamped his feet hard against the cold stones and looked at Barbara.

"Pull that cloak closer up about your throat," he said, smiling; and what an amount of confidence and solicitude there was expressed in the curt familiarity of his speech.

"Barbara looked very well to-night," remarked Octave lazily, glancing out at the white-clad figure in the moonlight.

"Ah," said Mrs. Damon, speaking in a muffled voice from behind the handkerchief she was holding before her mouth; "poor Barbara! She always needs a little more trimming."

"You really ought to speak to Mr. Floyd about his porter, mamma. It is outrageous. Ah, I see the door opening at last."

"There is the light coming," Lalli was saying at the same moment.

"Yes. I am sorry you were kept waiting. Good-night," said Barbara, putting out her hand. The motion loosened some flowers fastened in her dress. They fell to the ground.

"Oh, that is nothing — only some withered violets," she said hurriedly.

He held her hand close in his firm, warm grasp.

"The girl in my dream spoke differently when she gave me her hand," he said in a low voice.

She disengaged her fingers and turned away abruptly without answering. The sleepy porter handed her the light and a massive key. She took them both automatically. As she turned she saw Lalli stoop down, pick up the flower which had fallen, and put it away carefully in the breast-pocket of his coat. Then she went up-stairs. She unlocked the barred and iron-bound door. There was a light burning on the drawing-room table. She came forward slowly, her white cloak falling in long straight lines about her, and set her candle down, and rested her gloved hands upon the edge of the table and looked around her. The quick rattle of the carriage sounded far down the street, and then all was silent, with the peculiar warm close stillness of a sleeping house. There was a litter of her own things upon the table, — a disorder of gloves, a fan, some flowers she had meant to wear, still tied together in a glass. She looked at them with bright, dilated eyes. They had not had time to fade while so much had happened.

She pulled off her gloves slowly. She walked over to the window and opened it. The night air rushed in, cool and sharp. The moonlight lay cold like snow upon the whitened house-tops. The stars were shining frostily against a dark clear sky. She looked up at them with a curious thrill, — a curious exultant sense of changed experience. Life, not the life of books, not the sympathetic entering into another

being's past, but life as keen personal experience seemed drawing nearer to her. And youth awoke in her triumphant; expectation started into being, full grown; and the voice that was calling to her was confused and luring and irresistible as the voice of the treacherous sea.

## CHAPTER III.

IT was a pleasant house to lunch at — the Damons'. There was always a bright wood fire in the small drawing-room. There were flowers on the table. Octave's piano was standing open; Octave's birds were chirping by the window; it was Octave herself who attended to many of the details of this small and dainty housekeeping. She sat at her own place now, pouring out black coffee, and the sunlight was shining on her rose-red ribbons, and making a nimbus of dusky gold about her dark curly hair. A lap-dog was shivering before the hearth, but there was also a thin blue haze suggestive of cigarette-smoke to counteract the strictly feminine character of the room. It was three o'clock in the afternoon of the day after the Charity Ball. Perhaps it was the most natural thing under such circumstances that one should be discussing one's friends.

"The Floyds?" Mrs. Damon was saying, poisoning her spoon upon the edge of her coffee-cup, and turning her dark eyes meditatively towards Lexeter. "I have known about them all my life. Mr. Floyd — you have never seen him? Well, he is from Beaufort, South Carolina. I suppose even an Englishman knows what that means. The Floyds had very large estates before the war."

"Which presupposes that they have lost them since?" said Hardinge idly. He was watching Octave pour cream into her saucer to feed her dog. It was impossible for a man with eyes in his head — and his were keen young eyes — it was impossible not to notice the short exquisite curves of the girl's chin and throat as she laid her cheek down against the little creature's head. Perhaps it was equally impossible to resist the impulse to lean forward and stroke that glossy head a moment later. "An illustration of the force of a bad example," he said in a stage aside.

"Mamma says we look alike, Vix and I; two useless creatures with curly heads. Do you see the likeness?" Octave asked in the same tone, lifting the dog up on her shoulder and pressing his black nose against her dimpling cheek.

"He has been unfortunate, poor Mr. Floyd." Mrs. Damon lowered her voice, and glanced at the two young people complacently. "His wife ran away and left him. She is dead now — but such things leave a stain. It is very unfortunate for Barbara. It makes a prejudice. It is certainly very unfortunate for Barbara. But I never blamed her for it, I'm sure."

"Well, hardly," said Lexeter, successfully suppressing a smile.

He poured himself out a glass of water, and drank it.

"Man is said to be the only animal afflicted with an appetite for irrelevant knowledge. I wonder if



that can have anything to do with one's anxious scrutiny of the reasons which cause our neighbors' wives to run away?"

"Oh, I never knew her," said Mrs. Damon quickly. "It was a long time ago. Why, Barbara was a mere baby then, and they have been living in Rome at least — Octave, when did Mr. Floyd tell us he came to Rome? Do you remember?"

"Ten years ago, at least. When the war began. But Barbara has only been here — let me see. Barbara left school when she was fifteen, and she is a year older than I, so she must be twenty now. Barbara has been here five years," said Octave carelessly.

"I am admiring your arithmetical mind, Miss Damon," said Hardinge, leaning back in his chair and lighting another cigarette. It was an open question if she were not even more charming so; her head thrown back and her lips parted with that air of pretty, positive wisdom. "And as for what we should call at Oxford your powers of ratiocination —"

"The Floyds are such terribly proud people," said Mrs. Damon thoughtfully. "*Poinct fallir*, that is their device. Such things seem to run in some families."

"Or to run away from them," suggested Lexeter, looking at the crest on his fork.

"Ah! you are severe," said Mrs. Damon, smiling languidly.

But there was real kindness in the impulse which made her add: "I have always heard that there was

no blame attaching to Mr. Floyd. He was desperately in love with his wife, and he made the mistake of living alone with her on the plantation, with his old books and stuff. She was a gay, handsome girl, fond of pleasure — and he is not at all a Southerner in his tastes. You have never seen him? Ah, he is very ugly, poor man! But a thorough gentleman, of course. He has the real Southern courtesy; we hardly know it in the North." She looked down and fastened the clasp of her bracelet pensively. "Yes; one cannot help feeling sorry for poor Barbara," she said.

But no one meeting Barbara accidentally that morning would have found it easy to realize that here was a subject for compassion in this tall, healthy-looking girl, who was walking so lightly down the street, with the sun shining full upon her pale and somewhat haughty face. It was a face which underwent many transformations in the course of a day, and now, as they turned out of the Corso into a quieter street, she began talking carelessly to her companion, who was carrying a small basket, and there was a very eager and well-pleased look in her large, clear eyes.

"For you know, Margherita," she was saying rather confidentially, "it has been my dream all these years to go out riding on the Campagna. And I never could have done it without Octave. We always rode at home — at my own home, in the South. I can remember going all over the plantation on a pony before I was six years old. But papa does not like doing

the things now he did then," she added, half to herself.

"*Già*," said Margherita affirmatively. "The signore padre is not so young as he was," she said, crossing her yellow handkerchief more tightly over her handsome shoulders. "One can see by looking at him he is not strong."

"Papa has always looked like that," said Barbara quickly.

The old woman shook her head. "My eyes may not be so young as yours, but they have seen more things, Miss Barbara," she said emphatically. She felt the keen dramatic interest of the people — that interest which has never been dulled by reading — in all possible calamities.

"Oh, but that is all nonsense, you know," said Barbara hastily, putting up her gloved hand to her lips with a motion which was habitual to her in moments of mental excitement.

But the very suggestion had brought a cloud over her face. She was still preoccupied and inclined to be silent when they stopped before the high iron grating of the hospital gate. Margherita rang the bell. The door was immediately opened by a man in a blue apron, who inquired their errand, and conducted them across the court. The girl glanced rather timidly around at the bare gravelled space set about with orange-trees in pots.

"I have a permission to see the woman who was brought here yesterday," she said.

Their guide nodded and rang a bell.

"Female ward," he explained briefly to the white-aproned *infermière* who answered the summons. He leaned against the door-post and looked idly after Barbara, with his hands in his pockets, and holding the end of a straw between his thick, good-natured lips.

They went in under a low archway, and up a broad, shallow flight of stairs. The walls were painted of a dull yellow color. There was a long, bare corridor, with a line of doors opening out on either side.

"If you will wait here a moment I will call the sister," their conductor said, and left them. They waited. The building was perfectly silent. The air was damp and lifeless. The light seemed to creep reluctantly in at the small square windows near the roof. The sordid yellow walls seemed to shut out every remembrance of the joyous world of sunshine and breezy blue skies they had just left.

"It is like a prison, this," said Margherita, crossing herself and speaking under her breath.

One of the doors near them suddenly opened, and an attendant came out, carrying a pile of bandages on a tray. He glanced curiously at the strangers, but made no comment, passing on and leaving the door still open behind him.

"Look, signorina," said Margherita, plucking suddenly at her dress.

There was a cot drawn up close to the entrance. The man who was lying on it had his face hidden; his arm, all swathed in bandages, was fastened to a cord descending from the ceiling; it swung there helpless, with a curious look of disconnected suffering, as

if its owner had long since ceased to feel much personal interest in that piteous inert weight.

And now a rosy-cheeked sister of charity joined them, — a little plump woman with a bunch of keys rattling at her girdle, and a perpetual smile playing under the frilled borders of her cap. She listened to Barbara's explanation with her head on one side, and her round eyes sparkling like the eyes of some small, attentive bird.

*"Benissimo, benissimo.* It is number thirty-nine you want,—number thirty-nine. The woman who came in yesterday," she said briskly.

They followed her down another passage and into a long, bare, whitewashed room. One or two nuns in short black dresses were moving up and down between the double row of narrow cots; they looked with a dull curiosity at the visitors; once or twice their guide, who seemed to be a person of importance, stopped as they passed to give an order or make a remark.

Number thirty-nine was a small black-haired woman, with a decent and anxious face. She half lifted her heavy eyelids when the nurse bent over and spoke to her, but there came no light of recognition in the tired eyes.

"That is what I told the doctor. I said it the moment I set my eyes upon her, as the men were bringing her in. She will never last the two days out, I said," the sister commented, rubbing her keys thoughtfully and looking down upon the narrow bed.

"Well, the Lord have mercy upon her soul. And

on his too, poor man. He was always so full of his jokes, *poveretto* ! always a pleasant word for whoever went into his shop. This will make a difference in the street," said Margherita regretfully.

"But is there really nothing one might do for her ? It seems — it is impossible she should be dying," said Barbara, her face flushing suddenly.

At that instant there had come to her a sharp remembrance of having seen this poor creature a week — but was it so much as a week ? — ago, standing at the door of her little shop, playing with her child. She looked down with a quick, sharp pang of compassion at the honest, hard-working hands lying listlessly upon the white counterpane of the bed. Their work was over, the woman was busy dying now ; her familiar, insignificant face grew suddenly absorbed, dignified by a look of strange remoteness. Barbara looked down at the dying woman, at the long line of livid, commonplace faces, of white and rigid forms. Between each bed a small black crucifix was fastened against the wall. There was not the sound of a voice, not a movement, in all the length of the clean white room. Each motionless figure lay, self-centred in its own experience of pain ; isolated and apathetic ; silenced beneath the weight of this unintelligible world.

She stood a moment there, looking at it all with her clear, grave eyes. It was a moment which had its effect on Barbara's later action. It brought its own revelation of ardent and world-embracing pity ; that pity which, after five-and-twenty, is perhaps the predominant passion of really imaginative natures.

"Ah, but it must be strange, living here always?" said Margherita curiously.

"Eh!" The sister shrugged her little fat shoulders expressively. "It is a life like another. The doctors are a trial, certainly. The food is not bad. But you get accustomed to everything; the water ends by passing under the bridge with time." She glanced at Barbara and lowered her voice. "Your young lady is a foreigner? *Si vede!* I knew it by her dress. Ah, that is English, I said to myself. She is English, perhaps?"

"Other than English. My padroni are great people in the country that is farthest away of all," said Margherita, spreading her hands dramatically. After that a map seemed but a mean measure of distance.

The novelty of this experience had filled the old woman's mind with quite a pleasant tumult of ideas adapted for speedy communication. She was talking eagerly all the way down the stairs, and after they had passed out into the cheerful bustle of the sunny street.

"Jesu Maria! but one had quite forgotten the color of the blessed sun," she said, looking up at the expanse of fresh moving blue and white sky between the palace roofs.

They had come out again on the Corso, near the Piazza del Popolo.

"I must go up for a minute to see about Miss Maclean," Barbara had said.

They climbed up another narrow, dark, intermina-

ble stair. At the top of the tall house there was a small square landing. A spotless cotton curtain hung before the single window, shutting out the view of the huddled, innumerable house-tops, with here and there a tower rising above them, and here and there the black swaying cypress of some quiet convent close. Across the bridges and the yellow river, the flag was fluttering, a mere red spot in the sunlight, above the massive roundness of St. Angelo; higher up against the sky, there was another roundness, the dark tops of the pines of Monte Mario. To-day Barbara never drew aside the trim, spotless curtain. She rang the bell. A loud, pleasant voice called out, —

“*Chi è?*” And then an iron plate was shot back in the door, and somebody stooped to look through the peep-hole.

“Eh, miss, the Lord be gude to us, but this is a bonny sight for sair een!”

The door was thrown open suddenly, and a decent elderly Scotchwoman appeared in the entrance, smiling a broad welcome and smoothing her white apron with both hands. “Eh, but the leddies will be fine and vexed to miss seeing you, Miss Barbara, and you coming up all those stairs.”

“Never mind that, Jessie, tell them I shall come again very soon. And how is Miss Janet?” said Barbara, smiling.

“Fairly well, the day. And to think that I should have called to you through yon mouse-trap,” said Jessie, looking reproachfully at the door, and beginning to polish off the plate with her apron. “Eh,



but it's an ill wark changing the custom in this Papist country, Miss Barbara."

Barbara laughed.

"Don't forget to give Miss Janet my love," she said, turning to go, not without a feeling of relief. Speech, just then, seemed at once difficult and superfluous. She walked on rapidly towards home, her mind still wholly absorbed in a vivid reproduction of the faces she had just seen. It even occurred to her at that moment, that here in the hospital might be the opportunity for the simplest and most direct expression of that yearning good-will towards her fellow-creatures, which had been growing up in her from her earliest childish days. It is surely a prejudice which leads us so exclusively to connect the idea of philanthropy with middle-aged gentlemen, and well-authenticated bank-accounts. No spirit could have turned with more ardent importunity to every possibility of impersonal action than that which was animating this young girl as she passed along these old, gloomy Roman streets. For those earliest impressions of hers were all inextricably interwoven with enthusiastic recollections of a larger ideal of life and devotion and duty than commonly falls to a girl's share. She had grown up in the midst of a great national struggle, at a time when the heroic possibilities of life had become passionately present; the stories of her childhood had been stories of chivalric endeavor; a belief in the likelihood of contemporary heroism was as much, and as unconsciously, a part of her experience, as her vision,

of the early lilacs in spring, or the light of morning skies over the summer fields, through which her childish feet had passed. Her large and loving heart had never entirely lost this early sense of fellowship with all effort and all disappointment.

This morning she looked a little wistfully at the many faces of strangers which she passed, the thought coming and then returning involuntarily again and again, that she knew of no one on whose sympathy in these things she could count. On that March morning the world was still more than nine years behind its present point of satisfactoriness. Even had Barbara's school education not been of the slightest possible texture, it was only in the highest centres of civilization that young ladies had begun substituting the mastery of the Greek irregular verbs to the attempted coercion of eligible suitors. There was no one in the Roman set of those days who would have listened to any expression of a girl's impulse towards some form of life-long sacrifice without recommending matrimony.

"I know so well how it would be," she was thinking, as she walked on homewards, turning at the street corners automatically, and lending an inattentive ear to Margherita's unwearying strain of gossip, "if I should even speak of the hospital, Mrs. Damon would go to papa and suggest the urgent need of my entering society. Society! as if what I wanted was the opportunity of showing my new dresses to the most eligible young men who have come to Rome for the winter. And yet, after all, what else is there for

me to do?" she went on thinking, a little sadly. "Papa has his books —"

They were passing under the great shadow of the Pantheon. Barbara looked up involuntarily; her eyes fell upon a face she was conscious of having seen before; she looked again. The gentleman smiled and took off his hat. It was Mr. Lexeter. He came slowly up the steps and spoke to her.

"The gate is opened. Are you too old a Roman to come in?" he asked.

"Is it not rather a sign of stupidity to grow accustomed to great things?" said Barbara, looking at him gravely.

There were candles lighted on the nearest altar. Margherita kneeled down before them and crossed herself in a business-like manner.

"I have been lunching at Mrs. Damon's," said Lexeter, looking attentively at the tall slender figure in the tight fur-trimmed dress walking carelessly beside him, and remembering Mrs. Damon's remarks. "I left Hardinge there, settling something about a riding-party; I hope you mean to be persuaded to join us, Miss Floyd."

Her eyes grew suddenly bright. "Oh, but I should like it of all things," she said.

"Is there any part of the Campagna which you particularly care to see?" her companion asked carelessly enough. He was swinging his stick in his hand and looking up at the blue circle of sky above them.

"Oh, do you think we might go to Ostia? I have

not seen a pine-forest since we left home." Her face flushed a little. "But it would take all day; perhaps Mrs. Damon —"

"Mrs. Damon shall be reasoned with," said Lexeter confidently, looking at her with a smile. It occurred to him it would be worth taking some trouble to give this girl a pleasure. Of a sudden, and without clearly understanding how it had happened, he found himself speaking to her as to an old friend whom he had not met for years. "But you know — you know all about it," he was saying constantly.

"Yes; I know," Barbara answered simply. She looked at him from time to time, and already there was a pleasant sense of familiarity about the peculiarity of his gait. She was amused at first, but presently she began to like his somewhat imperative way of expressing his opinions.

"I cannot imagine how it was that I mistook you for an American last night," she said abruptly.

"It is Hardinge's fault. Hardinge has been educated at Oxford, *il est plus royaliste que le roi*; no mere Englishman would have the chance of a show beside him," Lexeter said, with rather an amused look.

They had nearly completed the circuit of the great gray dome. There was service going on at that farthest altar. They paused, half idly, to listen to it. The thin nasal chanting of the priest reached them but indistinctly at this distance; the blue film of incense-smoke was lost somewhere in those sombre depths; the sunshine poured in through the great

round skylight; from time to time the shadows of a cloud passed over the time-worn marble of the floor. They looked at each other and smiled with a sense of common pleasure in the stillness, in the glisten of the light along the old polished columns and on the empty shrines.

"By Jove!" said Lexeter, with a sudden air of disgust, pointing to the tinselled gewgaws and artificial flowers on one of these altars, "it's enough to make a man turn Communist on the spot! By Jove, Clough is right, —

All the incongruous things of past incompatible ages  
Seem to be treasured up here to make fools of present and  
future.

I never come in here without vowing I shall never look at the place by daylight again. There is something irritating about the embodied patience of those walls; I want them to fall."

"Ah," said Barbara, shaking her head playfully, "I am afraid you would make a very poor public monument."

He was frowning, and this unchecked evidence of bad temper seemed to give the last affirmative touch to the assurance of liking and sympathetic understanding which had sprung up between them.

"I am sure Margherita thinks you have been scolding me," Barbara said, turning with a smile to give him her hand at the door.

The smile was still on her face as she passed down the street. Things seemed to be growing easier.

Now these riding-parties, for instance ; if one wanted to show any particular friendliness to a person in trouble, what would be easier than to invite him to join one of these excursions ? " It was certainly a great mistake not to have been more explicit with — with Count Lalli last night." It was so awkward, the girl reflected gravely, when things were left so that they absolutely necessitated another interview. She looked slightly defiant as the necessity of this further explanation began forcing itself more urgently upon her mind. Lalli's words and look recurred more vividly to her imagination. She was living over again the scenes of last night, for — the thought would obtrude itself almost like a regret — it would probably be some time before they met again. Indeed, all that depended upon Octave ; certainly he knew their house, but nothing had been said about calling.

In one of those very streets through which she was passing two young men were seated together in one of the highest rooms of a tall, dingy house. But, notwithstanding their elevation, there was nothing pinched or poverty-stricken about the aspect of these rooms. To be sure, there was no fire in the small iron grate, but an elaborately embroidered screen hung down from the mantelpiece to hide this absence. There were various carefully arranged trophies of pipes and daggers and shining firearms suspended from the wall. The small hard sofa bore marks of frequent usage. A liqueur-case stood, half opened, in

one corner; the set of swinging shelves was fairly crowded with paper-covered novels; a few French books had even found a temporary resting-place on the corner of the small toilette-table in the inner room, before which Count Lalli was standing. To Anglo-Saxon eyes there might have been something a trifle absurd in the contrast between the keen soldierly face of this tall athletic-looking young man and the elaborate array of small pots of pomatum and perfumes and microscopic brushes of which he had evidently been making use. His actual companion is clearly not of this opinion. Indeed he has thrown more than one glance of respectful interest at all this display since first he took up that position, which seems to combine at once perfect personal comfort with a frank disregard of outline, upon the corner of the bed.

"It seems rather hard, *per Bacco!* that you should have been the one to meet her," he says presently, without removing the cigar from his mouth, and with the air of continuing a previous conversation. "Rather too hard, by Jove!"

"Oh," said Lalli deliberately, walking over to the fireplace and beginning to look for a match, "you would not have stood a chance in any case." He lighted a cigarette and puffed at it slowly. "By the way, there is something you must do for me," he added with affected carelessness.

"Such as —?"

"It is only keeping that confounded tongue of yours quiet. The fact is, I — well, I made use of the

valuable information you had given me. You have kept me so much *au courant* of the fair Barbara's movements — you must admit I have been a patient listener, *caro mio* — that I found myself in the position of being able to give her a very fairly accurate report of the various places she has been to this week. Women like that sort of thing, as I've often told you."

"Do you mean to say," said Borgia, sitting up abruptly and glaring at him, — "do you mean to say you told her this about yourself?"

"Exactly, my dear boy."

"That you made her believe that it was *you* who had been admiring her? *You* who had been going to every blessed church in Rome on the chance of meeting her? *You* who —"

"I — myself. Precisely. She seemed quite pleased by it," said Lalli, laying down his cigarette and smiling reflectively. "And why shouldn't I have done it?" he said, turning with sudden sharpness upon his companion. "Would n't you have done it yourself in my place? Would n't you have done it? Eh? Tell the truth for once. (*Di'la verità.*) Would n't you have done it?"

Borgia's jaw relaxed. "I call it a confounded shame. That's all," he said sulkily, kicking the rug aside with his foot, and looking sullen defiance at his leader.

But for all that they parted on the best of terms within five minutes.

"I shall see you to-night at the theatre of course?"



Cesco suggested quite cheerfully, taking some half-faded violets out of a glass on his writing-table and pinning them carefully into his coat. And although Borgia could not refrain from glancing rather viciously at these flowers, and saying, "That is what you got for betraying me, I suppose," in an aggrieved tone, still it was with a comparatively resigned manner that he watched his friend hail a passing street cab and drive off in it at the breakneck pace he habitually affected.

We all have our ideals. It is possible that even our least worthy actions may arouse some admiring and imitative echo in some subordinate mind. Cesco Lalli was Marcantonio Borgia's ideal. The gallant presence of the dashing and discontented ex-officer reigned as paramount over his weaker imagination as the solitary statue of some Polynesian god, standing supreme upon his uninhabited island, if one may still be allowed to call an island uninhabited when it is peopled by monkeys?

This is how it happened, that when Barbara reached home she heard the sound of voices in the drawing-room. A tall figure sprang respectfully to his feet as she entered, and the first thing she was conscious of was the fretful tone in her father's voice as he said, —

"Barbara! don't you recognize your friend, Count Lalli?"

## CHAPTER IV.

SHE gave him her hand without a moment's hesitation.

"Oh," she said, looking at him with some slight surprise, but speaking quite cheerfully, "it is curious to see you ; I was thinking about you only a moment ago."

"You were thinking something complimentary, I hope?"

"Well, I am not sure," she began a little doubtfully, looking up at him with the dawning of a smile. "I —"

Her eyes fell suddenly upon the bunch of withered violets in his coat. Her cheek flushed and she was silent. She sat down rather hurriedly and began taking off her gloves.

"Count Lalli has been giving me much information about the Campagna. He has been telling me of certain places of interest I have not visited as yet," observed Mr. Floyd, turning with explanatory courtesies to his daughter. "For instance, he mentioned —"

"*Gid!* I was speaking of Bracciano," the young man interrupted rather eagerly ; "I was telling you about it, Mr. Floyd, was I not?"

Mr. Floyd assented gravely. It was impossible to say what he thought of the interruption, or, indeed,

to understand in the least in what light he was contemplating this new and audacious visitor. He sat well back in his old red arm-chair, with his short legs crossed one over the other, and the tips of his fingers pressed together. He conversed with perfect civility. From time to time he turned his keen, pale eyes upon the young man's face and let them rest there with deliberate scrutiny. That was all. Not even his daughter could have detected any trace of annoyance or even of fatigue in the tone of his soft and somewhat monotonous voice.

"I was speaking of Bracciano. The castle is something stupendous. You ought by all means to see it. It is a part of the country which strangers do not often visit. I wish I could persuade Signor Floyd to come and have a look at it. Imagine, signorina, a castle of the tenth century; perhaps even earlier. Tenth century! One does not see a thing like that every day."

"Of the fifteenth, I fancy," said Mr. Floyd quietly. "Bracciano was built by the Orsini family in fifteen hundred and something. I am not sure about the precise year."

"Well, then, a fifteenth-century castle. It's very much the same sort of thing, you know," said Lalli, looking at Mr. Floyd with unruffled equanimity. "I know the place very well. I have often ridden out there. I have relatives who live in the town. There is the lake, too; the lake is worth seeing; and the country is pleasant now that spring has come." He looked at Barbara. "I am sure you would enjoy it."

"Perhaps — I think I should," the girl said a little shyly.

Ordinarily she found very little difficulty in talking to her father's visitors, or at least in listening to their talk with evident signs of interest. She was quite well aware now that her father was regarding her with an expression which implied disapproval of her constrained manner, when he said, —

"Barbara, will you kindly ring the bell? Margherita has brought no wine."

This reproof of her inattention to the wants of her guest did not prevent a sense of relief in the excuse it furnished for getting up and moving across the room; although the next instant the change of position brought its own rush of intense self-consciousness.

She gave her orders briefly to the servant, but she did not immediately return to her old place. She walked over to the writing-table and altered the position of some papers. The sense of the tacit understanding between herself and this stranger was like something in the air. It was all the more oppressive for its indefiniteness. It had been forced upon her. It was intolerable. She bent down lower over the papers, and there was a quick, indignant look of resentment in her eyes, which boded no especial good to Lalli.

"The chief, I might almost say the only difficulty would lie in the distance; in the distance from Rome, you know," she could hear her father saying; and a child might have seen how his disapproval of his daugh-

ter's conduct was beginning to influence him favorably towards the innocent victim of such inhospitality.

"The distance is not more than twenty miles — well, a long twenty miles," the young man argued rather eagerly; "we could easily go there and get back in the day. If staying there overnight is out of the question —"

"Quite out of the question."

"Oh, but there is nothing simpler than coming back. We are not in winter now, *che diavolo!* The days are growing long. Look here, Mr. Floyd; say we start in the morning. We are off by eight o'clock. Say it takes us two hours and a half to get there —"

"It will be nearer four."

"Well, say three hours — three hours and a half," said this obliging young man, — "we are there by eleven or twelve o'clock at latest. We lunch at my aunt's house, — we lunch at the inn if you prefer it, — we see all the castle; by five o'clock the horses are rested and we are ready to start back for Rome. And you have seen something stupendous — out of the way. I am sure you would like it," he said, turning suddenly to Barbara.

She had been listening with brightening eyes; but now, at this unexpected appeal, she turned away and began busying herself with the wine-glasses.

"If papa chooses to go, I dare say it will be interesting," she said, beginning to pour something rather recklessly out of a decanter.

Lalli rose at once, and politely relieved her of the burden.

"Shall I offer you some of your own wine, Mr. Floyd?" he asked gayly. He was placing himself quite on the footing of an old *habitué* of the house. But there was surely a certain restlessness in his glance, which kept continually seeking Barbara's. Her face had grown a little pale; she never looked at him. It was curious how little this seemed to affect his cheerfulness.

"By the way, Mr. Floyd, you who are interested in painting, you should see the collection of portraits there, at Bracciano — family portraits. And in the great hall there are frescos — something wonderful — by — I forget the man's name. Zu—Zu—Zucchetti?"

"By Zuccherro, perhaps?" said Mr. Floyd, with a sudden gleam of interest. I have an old woodcut of one of them. Very poor work — atrocious; but interesting as being a fine example of the groping of a man's mind, when — Wait. You know the originals?"

"Oh, I saw them the last time I went over the castle with my cousin," said the young man carelessly, holding up his wine-glass against the light.

"I can show you the cut I speak of, if you will excuse me a moment," said Mr. Floyd, rising briskly from his chair.

He closed the door inadvertently behind him.

For a moment there was not a word exchanged between the two young people he had left together. Then Lalli put down his glass and leaned forward and spoke.

"Will you tell me what I have done to make you angry with me?" he said gently. His voice had altogether changed from the formal tone in which from time to time he had addressed her in her father's presence.

She was quick to feel the significance of this transformation. The color sprang to her cheeks resentfully. Her voice was trembling a little, as with suppressed anger, as she said, —

"I wish to tell you — I wished to meet you to tell you of it — I will not be spoken to as if — I mean — You have nothing to say to me which you cannot say before papa," she concluded irrelevantly.

Lalli did not answer for a moment. He was puzzled. He could see that something had gone wrong, but it never occurred to him, — his mind glancing far and wide for an explanation, — the idea never suggested itself to him that an outraged sense of probity could have anything to do with this inexplicable emotion. For an instant he even thought of asking if there had been anything in his manner calculated to arouse Mr. Floyd's suspicions; but, on consideration, this did not seem probable; "I am not a school-boy to betray myself," he reflected quickly. He fixed his dark, imperious eyes more entreatingly upon her.

"Will you not tell me what I have done to make you angry?" he repeated gently.

He spoke in the tone he would have used in speaking to a frightened child. She had taken up a paper-cutter from the table and was playing with it nervously, but he could see that her fingers were

trembling. Perhaps he was inclined to interpret this agitation as something favorable to himself.

"I did not think you would be vexed with me for coming so soon," he said tentatively. "I thought that after what I told you last night —"

Her fingers suddenly tightened their grasp upon the toy dagger she was holding, and her lips parted, but she said nothing.

"Perhaps I made a mistake in coming at all?"

Still she said nothing.

He looked at her, and for an instant a keen and cruel light, a light as keen as the flash of a sword-blade, gleamed in his bold and arrogant eyes, but he said humbly enough, —

"It was the first thing I thought of this morning. It came to me when I woke. I knew that there was some good thing had come to me, and then I remembered our agreement of last night."

She flushed and let the paper-knife fall to the ground and sat up straight in her chair.

"But, Count Lalli —" she began in a low voice.

He gave her no time to continue.

"Do you know that I have been out on the Campagna since before daybreak? I slept for half an hour, while they were saddling my horse. I had to ride all over the *tenuta* to give my men some orders about — oh, about the draining and that sort of thing. You would not understand it, and it is a wonder how they managed to understand it, poor devils, for do you know what I was thinking of out there? I thought that perhaps fate had grown weary of perse-



cuting me. I said to Destiny, 'Do what you like now, for as for me, I have got a — a new friend.'

He hesitated, and shot a rapid glance at her flushed and troubled face.

"You should have seen the way old Gian Battista stared at me," he said. "Gian Battista, the old *fattore*, who was already overseer of the farm in my father's time. I had him up and out before daylight, and if you could have seen his expression when he heard that I meant to be back in Rome this afternoon!"

He took up her glove, which was lying on the table, and looked at it, and laid it down again. "I have thought of nothing else since last night, of nothing but of coming and seeing you again," he said vehemently; and if the assertion was rather a rash one, that is not to be wondered at. It was literally the first time in his life that he had ever been left, alone, in an authorized *tête-à-tête* with a young girl.

She threw back her head a little at that, and looked him squarely in the face.

"Surely your own judgment should prevent you from saying such things to me, Count Lalli," she said, rather proudly. "We are strangers to each other. Why do you try" — she hesitated for a second or two, and then went on bravely, but the color was burning on her cheek, — "why do you try to make me feel as if there were some — some secret understanding between us? I do not know you. I — I do not understand —"

To her inexpressible confusion and bewilderment, her eyes filled suddenly with tears. She sprang up

hastily and walked over to the nearest window. In her intense desire to conceal this humiliating weakness, she quite forgot the importance she had attached to this explanation. "Papa seems to be a long time in finding that print. I wonder if it is mislaid? or if I should go and help him look for it?" she said, with an attempt at speaking quite carelessly.

Lalli had thrown himself back in his chair, and was looking earnestly at the contents of his wine-glass. His quick ear had caught the sound of the distant closing of a door.

"This is excellent Velletri of yours, Mr. Floyd," he said almost immediately, rising to receive the old-fashioned woodcut which was offered to him, and pretending to examine it with much interest and attention; "but I think I could give you the address of a wine-shop where you would get some red wine that would astonish you. It comes to Rome in sealed barrels. I know the man at whose *vigna* it is made. And it is a pagan wine, too, for it has never been baptized at the city gates. I will give you the address."

"Oh, you are very kind. But we don't drink much wine here," Mr. Floyd said, taking back his discolored print and looking fondly at it; "I seldom care for it myself, and my daughter — my daughter prefers white wine to this, I believe."

"Foreign wine, perhaps? Some people are very fond of the Rhine wines. I don't care for them myself, but perhaps you like the Rhine wine better, signorina?"

There did not seem, to Mr. Floyd at least, to be anything offensive in this simple question. Indeed, it was uttered with quite a marked expression of formality and respect; but Barbara seemed scarcely grateful to her guest for this polite attempt to include her in the general conversation. She was still seated by the farther window, her eyes were downcast, she was looking pale.

"On the whole, I think then we may as well go to-morrow. The weather seems settled, and the day in the country will do my daughter good after the fatigue of her first ball," she heard her father say. She understood the implied explanation of her own lack of cordiality. She gave Count Lalli her hand, when he approached her to say good-by, with an air of quiet and proud negation. At that moment the chief impression connected with him in her mind was a fervent wish not to meet him, not to be with him again.

She rose as soon as he had left the room, and began putting her gloves and one or two things together.

"We shall start at seven o'clock; you had better tell Margherita," her father said presently, adjusting his woodcut carefully in its place in a somewhat dusty portfolio.

"Very well, papa."

"You do not seem pleased," he said rather impatiently; "I thought you were always so pleased at the prospect of a day in the country? However, you have yourself to thank if this does not satisfy you. I suppose that is a friend of Octave Damon's — that rather stupid young man?"

"Octave introduced him to me," said Barbara slowly. In spite of that instinctive scorn of all the minor forms of deception, which from time to time had shocked Mrs. Damon into a regretful conviction of Barbara's unconventionality, it cost her a distinct effort now to add: "I — I am not sure that I like Count Lalli, papa. I do not like his manner. I think he —"

The remembrance of the tone in which he had said, "I have thought of nothing but seeing you again," silenced her by its cutting suggestion of ingratitude. Her eager, prefiguring imagination seized upon the fact of his disappointment in her; she seemed in some measure to become responsible for his embittered way of envisaging daily life. To her generous and sympathetic nature any urgent appeal came with the force of a moral claim. She hesitated, and looked down, and was silent.

"Well," said Mr. Floyd, tying the last string of his portfolio, "I saw nothing amiss in his manner myself. You cannot expect an Italian to talk to you as an Englishman or an American would. It is not the custom of the country. This young man has not probably met many strangers. You must remember that he thinks he is paying you a compliment by treating you with great formality." He got up from his chair and put his portfolio under his arm. "I should be pleased to see you a little more cordial in your manner to-morrow, Barbara. For the time being, I consider this young man as our guest."

"But, papa —" the girl began desperately.

And then Margherita came in and began making a disturbance among the decanters and glasses.

"And if you please, sir, the man has been again about those frames," she said, pausing in front of Mr. Floyd as she was carrying out the tray.

"The deuce he has!" he said, opening the door hurriedly. "Where have they been put then? Where have you put them?"

"Oh," said the old woman comfortably, "he said, 'Tell your master,' said he, 'that one of my men has been ill; and one has won a prize in the lottery; and last week' — there were two *festas* last week — Eh, Miss Barbara, but the *signor padre* is in a fine temper this afternoon; *Madonna mia!* but it is true that that frame-maker is a liar, poor man. *Come si fa!* Poor people must live, and have their little bit of pleasure."

She set the tray down on the table in an incidental manner, and crossed her arms thoughtfully.

"It is a pity we took the trouble to go there this morning, Miss Barbara. They say it brings evil fortune to have been so near a dying person. The porter has just come up and told me of it; the pizzicaruolo's wife is dead."

The girl started, and looked up.

"Dead!"

"Ah," said Margherita regretfully, "they say it always brings evil fortune." She considered a moment. "But I shall play the number of her bed in the lottery," she added more cheerfully.

Barbara looked at her and said nothing.

She went to her own room and shut herself in. She sat down on a low chair by the side of the bed and looked at the ground. She had still her hat on as she had come in from her walk; her attitude was one of weariness and discouragement. She seemed to have lived so much within the last few hours. The livid, commonplace countenance of the woman in her hospital-bed seemed only a sign, an expression, of all the unnoted sorrow of the world. She turned with a half-sob from this image to every thought of tenderness and warm human kindness. The remembrance of Lalli's gentleness and care of her touched her with an exquisite pain. She put up her hand to her lips with a movement which was habitual to her. "If one could only feel safe from the necessity of giving pain."

She had been sitting so for some minutes before her attention was aroused by a small continuous tapping at her window; her eyes turned mechanically in the direction of this sound; some tame pigeons were strutting up and down the outer ledge, waiting for their accustomed food. She rose languidly enough to get it for them. She stood leaning against the open casement looking idly out. One of the pigeons was eating greedily, the other was more watchful, taking its food in sudden rushes, observing her movements warily with round and shining eyes. It was curious in after years how vividly she recollected that moment — its absolute stillness; the look of the convent roof against the quiet blue of the afternoon sky; the softness of the spring wind in her face; the restless rust-

ling and cooing of the doves. She looked back to it with a curious, a melancholy interest — as a man who has narrowly escaped death by shipwreck might remember his first slight, half-careless uneasiness at sea.

To dream of noble possibilities, to awaken in the tightening mesh of petty and inescapable circumstance — surely this is no such new experience? And hers was no uncommon destiny. It was but one of countless other existences, — a life ardent in desire, enthusiastic in purpose, but insignificant in result and full of extreme sadness. But it had a purpose. And circumstance is an inexorable god. Surely it is well with us if even — if only — in supreme moments of emotion, we are yet capable of attaining to motives of action too high for reach from flat and common paths of life.

## CHAPTER V.

COUNT CESCO LALLI had been making his reflections. As he sat in his accustomed place at the Valle Theatre that night his attention was sorely wandering. He was looking, it is true, at the stage, where for the fourteenth time in five weeks they were playing the "Belle Helene" of Offenbach, but what little he heard of the dialogue served merely to suggest long, rambling trains of reminiscence. His past life came back to him in vivid, detached fragments, as life often comes on the eve of some moral crisis. Some actor spoke of a school — he saw himself again a lad in the military college. He remembered the long damp corridors, the crowded classrooms, the vast empty court with its rows of leafless trees — hacked, stripped, denuded by countless restless hands; he thought, for the first time for years, of the high stone gates, the walls that had shut in so many years of his boyhood. He remembered the thin severe face of the officiating priest on the first occasion he had been selected to serve at mass; he remembered his own confusion over the responses, the half-curious, half-defiant feeling with which he had knelt in full view of all his familiar comrades; he had forgotten a hundred other things, and the look



of that priest's face and the smell of that incense were still vivid. He remembered twenty different school-boy pranks, old escapades, quarrels, a crowd of forgotten faces; the face of his greatest ally; — he had married since; he had passed captain; he was shot at Solferino; — Marcantonio Borgia's face while they were still boys together. He turned and stared at his companion.

"That little Teresina is not a bad little actress, *che diavolo!* not a bad little actress. But there is nothing like a ballet, after all," said Borgia complacently, putting up two yellow fingers to smooth his mustache.

Lalli burst out laughing. "If old Padre Giacomo could hear you!" he said.

"What! old Padre Giacomo the Jesuit? The old boy we used to confess to at the Academy?" Borgia asked, opening his eyes wider.

Lalli did not answer. Old Padre Giacomo! Ah, they had been afraid of him once! He remembered later days, — old holidays down in the country, old visits to Bracciano. Then manhood. The day when the great gates opened. His first uniform; his horse; the click of the spurs, the rattle of the sword when he entered a café and the girl behind the counter turned to look at him; the life with the regiment; his first love; his first duel — how far off it all seemed! He was only thirty now. He stared hard at the stage. What a life it had been! and lately what a blank! He thought of himself, the dashing cavalry officer of two years before, and now — His

thoughts turned suddenly to Barbara, and he smiled. He rose when the others did ; he too lounged back against the opposite stall, and stroked his mustache and surveyed the boxes between the acts with a disdainful and critical air. But it was noticeable that at intervals that same indefinable smile crossed his lips, and his dark and arrogant eyes glittered at moments with an indescribable assurance of dominion and victory.

But it was not in this mood the next morning that he approached Barbara. She was alone for the moment, but it was with a great show of gentleness and self-restraint that he wished her good morning. He apologized for the liberty he had taken in appearing before her in his rough shooting-dress. He did not offer to shake hands.

"I have been thinking about — about yesterday," he said in a low voice. He could see without looking that her face was more than usually serious and constrained. "I have been thinking that you were right in saying that you did not know me. Sometime when you do know me, perhaps you will give me some other flowers to take the place of — this."

He drew out an elaborate card-case, emblazoned with his arms and monogram, and opened it. There was a bunch of withered violets in an inner pocket. He laid them on the table.

"Sometime, when you know me better," he said.

He stepped back and stood before her — a tall soldierly figure in dark green. He had on high top-boots, which reached to his knee ; he held a light

fowling-piece in one hand, and there was a feather in his hat. At another time Barbara might have been amused at the somewhat theatrical completeness of this costume ; but now she hardly looked at him.

"You are very good to me," she said shyly. She took the flowers from the table and threw them rather hastily into a drawer. Her fingers were trembling a little.

"And now I am forgiven and we are really friends," said Lalli, watching her. The color rushed to her pale cheeks, but she smiled too in a pleased sort of way, and she lifted her clear, candid eyes up to his.

"Yes, really friends," she said. She stood silent, fingering the books upon the table for a moment, and then — perhaps a recollection of her father's hospitable maxims came back to her : "You have had no breakfast. Very well, then. But at any rate I must give you a cup of tea," she said.

She walked over to the small and dainty table, and he followed her.

"There is a chair, and will you have tea or coffee ?" she asked gravely.

"Coffee, please."

He watched her white hands busying themselves about his cup with a perfectly new sensation of amusement and pleasure. There was something infinitely attractive and fascinating to the Italian in this touch of careless familiarity. He glanced about the large, low-ceilinged room with a feeling of being at home, an impulse of liking which extended even to the heavy, old-fashioned chairs and Barbara's bowls of flowers on the tables.

"You don't have anything yourself," he said, looking at her. She was standing opposite him buttoning her gloves. Her eyes were downcast.

"I have had my breakfast," she said quickly.

Margherita came in; her arms were full of wraps. The girl turned to her hastily. She felt very happy, but she was embarrassed as well. She insisted upon loading herself with more cloaks than she could carry; she protested that there was no weight to speak of; but when Lalli took half of them away from her again she made no objection. She stood patiently and let him arrange them as he pleased. She looked up into his face again as he bent over her while she thanked him, and they smiled at each other with a quick, simultaneous sense of pleasure in — in what?

"It will be a delicious day for the country," Barbara said confidently, looking back and nodding emphatically at the two men following her down the palace stair.

It was not yet seven o'clock. The shops were still closed; the shutters barred in all the houses. The few foot-passengers they passed stopped short to stare at the smiling faces of this holiday party. The horses rattled their bells and shook the gaudy trappings of their harness; the driver straightened himself up and waved his whip with an air of importance as he answered "*Bracciano!*" to the question of the custom-house soldiers lounging about in the early sunshine at the city gate.

It was a clear, cool morning; the sky was still pale

and colorless. The carriage-wheels made fresh tracks in the light dust which lay over the road ; from time to time a bird flew out of the bare budding hedges ; the grass was drenched with dew, and the sun was still red upon the hills and tree-tops. They tramped with a steady, swinging trot up the short stony incline of the Ponte Molle ; the calm, broad surface of the Tiber was gleaming in long silvery streaks ; a breath of wind blew over them from the shadowy water, the sun had not yet warmed those brown and heavy banks.

Perhaps of all the many Campagna ways, that road to Bracciano is most desolate. For miles they drove through utter solitude. The great city behind them sank lower between the grassy foldings of the hills ; the gray dome of St. Peter's glittered for an instant in the early morning sunlight, and Rome had faded away like some strange vision of heavy, silent walls. They were driving across old battle-fields, and the confident little daisies were lifting up a million fresh, round, dew-washed faces to the sun. They passed the burial-place of cities, whose very names strike thinly on the ear, like hollow, wandering ghosts ; but it was only to hear the voice of unseen larks calling through the stillness, like the voice of the delicate-footed spring, wakening with sweet insistence the melancholy plain.

They talked and laughed lightly enough as they drove along in the pleasant morning freshness, and the horses rattled their bells, and the sun grew warm upon their faces, but the silence of the Campagna never changed. The wheels rattled over the rough pavement of La Storta ; a man was standing in the

doorway of the old posting inn; a dog barked after them as they passed, and some fever-stricken children raised a shrill and ineffectual shout. The road turned to the left, the houses vanished, the feeble flicker of human life was gone, blotted out of remembrance by the vast majesty of this immemorial calm. Mid-sea is not more lonely, or more inexorable; the tossing waves of the Atlantic have known no wilder storms than the fierce flood of conquest which broke and raged and passed away among these peaceful hills. And now, when the larks are singing, the silence there is like the silence of death; the great grassy hillsides lie bare to the tranquil sky, but the sunlight shining on them is as the sunlight on a grave.

It was nearly eleven o'clock before, the road rising a little, they saw a narrow silvery line beyond a row of trees.

"Ah, there is the lake!" said Lalli, rising suddenly to his feet. He steadied himself with one hand on the box, while he pointed out to her the different houses of Bracciano.

"My aunt is expecting our visit; I wrote to them yesterday," he said, as they entered the shadow of a narrow street. He looked about him with an air of amused recognition, and nodded good-humoredly to a group of men sitting on chairs before the café door. "I was stationed here once with a company of Zouaves."

"I suppose you found it dull. I observe that Italians in general avoid the country," said Mr. Floyd, looking eagerly up the street, past the yellow lichen-

covered roofs to where he could catch a glimpse of high gray castle walls.

"Oh," said Lalli, glancing imperceptibly at Barbara, "I amused myself."

He led the way into a narrow house and up some old winding stairs. A feeling of damp fell on them from the bare stone walls; their voices sounded hollow. They had to grope their way in the dark after the first turning.

"Give me your hand; I know the way," said Lalli, pausing.

He rang a bell sharply. The feeble tinkle died away; then came a sound of listless footsteps, and then a door opened in the darkness, and a girl's voice asked, —

"Who is it?"

Lalli dropped Barbara's fingers.

"It is I, Cesco, with my friends. Did you not know I was coming? Did you not get my letter?"

There was the rustle of a dress; Barbara was near enough to hear the sound of a quick catching of the breath on the part of some unseen person.

"Perhaps, if they do not expect us, papa, we had better not go in," she said in a low tone, and in English.

"It's only my cousin," said Lalli hastily, and at the same moment the voice which had spoken before added, —

"Come in, Cesco."

They followed the young girl into a large, light room, where other people were seated.

"This is my cousin, Regina," Lalli said.

The young girl fixed her magnificent eyes upon Barbara and said nothing. She went and stood beside the window, where the light fell full upon her heavy, disordered hair. She was dressed in a sort of loose, faded *peignoir*, dragged open at the throat. Her skin was of the warm golden tint of old marble. Her forehead was low and square, with thin, arched eyebrows; her red, disdainful lips were severely beautiful, like the mouth of a Greek goddess,—but of a living goddess.

Barbara turned involuntarily to look at Lalli. He was speaking to his aunt; the other lady was introduced, and seats were found and explanations were exchanged about the missing letter.

"The signorina speaks Italian? Ah, I hear. My nephew tells me he has brought you to look at our castello," the elder lady said.

There was a highly colored row of lithographs—the wars of Napoleon—hanging up near the ceiling around two sides of the room. The chairs were ranged neatly back against the walls. There was a vase of artificial flowers on either end of the chimney-piece, and a clock which ticked audibly in the pauses between Barbara's remarks.

"*Gid*. You have come to see our castle. *Gid*; I understand," the Contessa Lalli repeated thoughtfully.

The clock measured out the moments; a cock crowed shrilly far down the village street. Cesco Lalli was explaining again the mistake of the postman. He gesticulated more, and his voice was louder than it had been in speaking to them at home.



"My daughter, Regina, is gone to get you some cake and wine. You must take something before you go up to see our castle," the contessa said impressively.

Barbara glanced anxiously at her father; they had often laughed at these formal visits in Italian houses, but when had she ever felt this apologetic uneasiness, — this desire to account for, and conceal, deficiencies, before?

Regina returned. She had changed her dress in the interval; her superb hair was smoothed and rolled over cushions which doubled the size of her head. She was dressed in some woollen stuff of a bright hard blue; with very white cuffs, which were pulled down to cover half her hand; she had put on a chain and locket, which rattled against her stiff open collar when she turned her head. And with all that she was superbly beautiful. She came in carrying a small round tray in her hand; she presented the cake and wine to Mr. Floyd without a smile, with the air of a captive princess.

"Let me take that for you," said Lalli, rising and coming behind her.

She took no notice of his presence; she made no answer. Her delicate nostrils quivered for an instant, and she half shut her eyes involuntarily. That was all. Mr. Floyd, who was helping himself to cake, saw absolutely nothing.

"Let me take that tray, Gina."

"Let me pass," she said in a very low voice. Her mother and aunt were watching her, and she smiled

as she said it. She lifted her shining eyes to his for an instant, still smiling —

"Ah!" said Lalli, involuntarily stepping back. Not all the novels of Paul de Kock could prevent that instinctive movement of his hand to cross himself.

"Regina mia, the signorina will have some more wine," the old contessa said. She leaned forward and smoothed her daughter's dress complacently. "What were you doing in your room, *figlia mia*? Why did you go back there? Your aunt heard you going up the stairs a second time," she asked in a low voice.

"I went back — to light the candles before the Madonna," the girl said dutifully.

"Bene, that will be in honor of your visit, Miss — Miss Floyd. She is such a child yet," the mother said, looking tenderly after her. "I like to know what she does. It is not so with you foreign ladies, who are all so reasonable, and so — so emancipated."

"Why not?" said Barbara absently, looking over at Mr. Floyd, and then she started and sat up straighter and blushed a little at her own inattention. "I mean of course not. People are brought up very differently," she said in her clear, candid voice, turning her head to look at the contessa.

The Signora Lalli did not seem surprised by this incoherence; conversation implying any continuous line of ideas would by the very nature of things have ceased to be a pleasure, and this was essentially a visit of pleasure and curiosity. "Naturally you will never see her again. Still, you had better talk to that young lady while you are showing her the cas-

tle, Regina," the mother said when her guests had taken their departure. "She comes from outside, *de fuori*, she will know the fashions."

"I thought Cesco seemed very attentive," suggested the aunt, straightening the photograph-album upon the table. There were other books there as well, — a prayer-book with a gilt cross on the cover, and Regina's name on the title-page; there was also a much-worn copy of the Book of Dreams — for finding lucky numbers in the lottery. Between two of the leaves there was a sonnet printed on rose-colored paper; it was addressed: "To my Illustrious Friend and Fellow-Citizen, the noble Pietro Cesare Lalli, on the Auspicious Occasion of his Recovery from an attack of acute Bronchitis which threatened to End his Days." The words "Pietro Cesare Lalli" and "his Recovery" were printed in different colored inks.

"Those foreigners are always rich," the contessa said thoughtfully.

"Probably she is Protestant."

"They seldom have any religion," said Madame Lalli calmly. She had been as far as Milan on her wedding-tour, and her sister-in-law seldom contradicted her on any but household matters.

Apparently there were no such serious considerations to disturb the harmony of the little party wandering out there in the sunlight. They had stopped at the small inn to order their luncheon. Barbara looked rather anxiously at her father as they lounged about the courtyard, waiting for Lalli to rejoin them.

"I hope that you were not too much bored, papa?"

They — well, perhaps they are not very intellectual people, and all that, but they seemed very kind and anxious to please us," she said.

"My dear child, you are growing very exacting. That girl was charming; I don't know when I have seen such magnificent eyes. Ah, here comes our friend. Luncheon is ordered, is it? And now for a preliminary look at the castle," said Mr. Floyd briskly, striking the stones with his stick.

And now everything they looked at seemed to have the power of communicating some new pleasure to the girl. She called their attention to a hundred different chance effects of light and shade and color. She looked at the narrow picturesque ways, at the quaint outer stairs to many of the houses, at the steep tiled roofs with a sincere and evident delight. Perhaps there was something a trifle abnormal in such enthusiasm. Those old yellow lichen-covered walls had seldom been looked at with such caressing admiration before. And even at the rough little inn everything seemed to have conspired to give Barbara pleasure. She made friends with the landlady on the spot. She fed all the dogs who followed them gravely up the narrow stair. If the table had to be spread in an upper bedroom, to escape the intolerable noise of a band of festive carriers, at least the handful of spring flowers she had gathered in their hasty walk sufficed to give it an air of grace and home comfort. Mr. Floyd was very much amused by the exhibition of his daughter's evident wonderment and satisfaction, but even he had to admit that the thing had been well managed when

their hostess placed on the table a tall tapering bottle of Rhenish wine. "I knew that you preferred it, and — and it is very good of you not to mind roughing it a little," the young man said rather hastily. It was well worth having taken a little trouble to be looked at with such pleased and friendly eyes.

When at last they did go up to the castle, there was a fine breeze blowing the clouds about across the deep blue of the sky. The lake was rippling in the sunlight. From the castle terrace they could hear the faint lapping of the water against the old gray stones. Regina joined them at the archway. She would make no response to any of Barbara's advances; indeed she hardly spoke. She followed them silently up the paved causeway, through time-stained passages cut in the solid rock.

"It is strange," Mr. Floyd said seriously, leaning upon his stick and gazing earnestly about him as they entered the inner courtyard, "at that first entrance the architecture seemed purely mediæval — quite unaffected by any local influence. One might have believed one's self in any old Scotch castle. Here, on the contrary — look at that loggia, Barbara — the spirit of the place is strictly Italian, — a fine example of fifteenth-century gothic, very fine."

"Did you notice that too, papa? All that outer entrance is like one of Sir Walter Scott's novels," said Barbara eagerly.

Regina Lalli looked at her with an expression of undisguised contempt.

They explored long suites of bare, half-furnished

rooms; at every step the old, severe-visaged house-keeper unbarred some heavy shutter; the light streamed in on high bare walls, on blackened pictures, gaunt empty carved oak bedsteads, and rows upon rows of white-shrouded chairs. Here and there a mediocre family portrait, in eighteenth-century costume, looked down with faded eyes upon them; at every window-seat cut in the thick old walls they lingered to look out over the sunny, breezy expanse of the lake. Once, as Barbara passed with her quick, light step from one of these window-niches to the next, she came rather unexpectedly upon Lalli and his cousin. He turned about hastily.

"You who have read so much, you should know the legend about the lake there," he said. "I was telling it to my cousin. There was another town here in old Roman times, Sabate, and the lake has covered it over. Only the fishermen say that on a clear day, as you sail across the water, you can look down to the bottom and see the old towers still standing." He shrugged his shoulders. "It is a fable, *si capisce*."

"I believe it," said Barbara, smiling. She turned to Regina; "And you?"

"I don't know," the girl said sulkily enough.

They went down again to the terrace; they strolled together down the hill, between the hedges along the quiet country road. Behind them the grim old castle towered heavily against the changing sky. The ground beneath their feet was soft from recent rainfalls. Seen from this height the foldings of the Campagna were green with the short new grass. In this sheltered

lane, away from the wind, the air was warmer. The shifting clouds floated whitely by, trailing soft shadows over lake and road. The tepid afternoon was full of a sense of the sweet irresponsibility of the spring; the full red tree-buds glistened everywhere in the sun, and Barbara was constantly stopping to fill her hands with frail star-like blossoms clustering thickly about the wayward thorny hedges, which will not wait for leaves. Once, as she stopped to pass her fingers lovingly over some small yellowish folded ferns, Regina fixed her sombre gaze upon her cousin.

"Are you going to marry — that girl?" she asked imperiously.

He made no answer. He stood with his arms folded, looking at the ground.

"Listen!" said Barbara, calling to them softly. She lifted her hand, and a smile passed like a gleam of light over her sensitive face, as from across the lake on the farther shore, from out the gray stone mass of an antique convent church there floated a faint and fibreless sound of vesper-bells.

The shadow of the castle was deepening over the village street as their carriage rolled sharply over the stones. Before long, night had fallen. Looking back, the pale gold of the sunset had faded to a single silvery streak; a lonely ruined watch-tower rose in blackest silhouette against the clearness; before them they could just distinguish the paler outline of the road.

At that moment, in the town they had left behind them, a girl was crouching upon the floor in her own room before a painted image of the Madonna. She

had been weeping passionately ; possessed, shaken, mastered by gusts of fierce resentment,—a burning sense of impotent despair. In a moment of wilder desolation she had raised herself up suddenly and blown out the lighted candles of the shrine. Now, as she lay there moaning helplessly, her grief had assumed the form of an unreasoning terror at this horrible darkness which seemed the visible sign of all the ruined blackness of her life. The conviction that Cesco no longer cared for her returned with intolerable keenness. Her mother's room door stood ajar. She pressed her head hard against the bed-clothes to deaden the sound of her sobbing. She was delivered over to the passionate, wordless vehemence of her anguish, like some dumb creature stricken in the dark, enduring suffering for which it sees no cause.

Out there, on the Campagna, it was still light enough for the travellers to distinguish the pale outline of each other's faces. The horses were moving more slowly ; from time to time the driver whistled and spoke to them in the silence. Mr. Floyd had wrapped himself in his cloak, and leaned back in the corner of the carriage. At first Barbara thought he was asleep, then she heard him sigh. Heaven knows what old, old memories had been evoked by the charm of this soft, transparent night. She laid her hand rather timidly upon her father's. He did not reject it, and there was something in the unusual tenderness of the action which touched the girl in a quite indescribable way. She, too, leaned back, and was silent. It was a shadowless, moonless night. She looked up



at the pale luminous sky above her ; the air grew damper, and there was a sound of running water ; they climbed a hill, and the wind blew keen and fresh.

" You are not cold ? " said Lalli, bending solicitously near.

" No."

She could think of him better if he did not speak. Again they passed the houses of La Storta. A solitary light was burning in an upper window. A dog rushed out at them ; they could hear him barking far down the road ; the sound grew faint and fainter, and died presently away. There was nothing now to jar upon this perfect silence ; nothing to check their onward moving, farther and farther, along the unseen road.

## CHAPTER VI.

IT was with a distinct sense of annoyance, a feeling of having been forestalled, that Lexeter listened to an account of this Bracciano expedition. He heard of it first at the Floyds' house one afternoon when he was calling; it had become a habit with him to go there of late, and yet Lexeter was a man who lived very much by himself. He was at once irascible and sensitive; he had all the temperament of a poet, — a poet of meditation and sentiment, without the gift of expression. He was ambitious, and in his youth he had suffered from a degree of poverty which his pride had rendered intolerable. He had acquired a habit of sufficing to himself, but it was only a habit; it was something argued out, — the result of deliberate conviction. Walter Hardinge, with all his frank, careless manner, his ready friendliness, his apparent impressionability, was gifted in reality with a hundred times more self-reliance, more power of will, than this other man so much his senior in years and in experience. To one of them the world was a thing to be denied, derided, and never quite forgotten, and passionately desired. To the other it was the most natural, the most enjoyable, the most subordinate of possessions. Hardinge's imagination

was never troubled beyond the pitch of delight ; he was born for success, for vivid sympathies, for clear beliefs, and definite confidence of action. One of them could see distinctly what the other believed. One contemplated life, the other thought about living. Perhaps it was this which had made them friends in the first place ; but there was a fascination about Hardinge, about his young enjoyment of all the worn, old detail of existence, which was quite irresistible. His mind was ardent, courageous, objective. He had the rarest, the most attractive of qualities, — he was alive, keenly alive, and he was satisfied.

But Lexeter was not easily satisfied. It would perhaps have been difficult for him to have explained, even to himself, the attraction he found in the long hours he spent in the Floyds' apartment, smoking reflectively, or discussing old books with Mr. Floyd, and varying editions. He was an indefatigable book-collector.

"It is the brutal good sense of my own contributions to the British newspaper which has driven me to this," he said to Barbara on one occasion. He had a small parchment-covered volume in his hand, which he had bought on his way to the house. "This quaint, complacent elaboration of trivial learning gratifies my sense of the eternal equilibrium of things. I even begin to believe my own leading articles may be forgotten — in time." He turned over a few of the brown, discolored pages. "I like the thin, remote, high-bred latinity of these sonnets. They are so bad, so delightfully, execrably bad in style — and so use-

less. They are the merest ghosts of spent and artificial force."

"Do you know at one time I believed that all the men who wrote for newspapers were such wise people, with such well-disciplined minds," said Barbara, smiling, and lifting up her eyes from her work.

It always gave him pleasure when she looked at him. Sometimes he did not speak to her twice in the course of an afternoon. She went in and out of the room, busied about a hundred different trifles. Sometimes she asked his advice about reading. Once she had even told him something about her visit to the hospital. Of late she had grown more silent; she would sit for hours by the high old-fashioned window, apparently absorbed in her work. The light streamed in upon her pale round cheek, upon her white moving fingers, upon her soft ash-colored hair; from time to time she would look up or speak to her father, and what a frankness, what a sense of security, there was in that look! Mr. Floyd himself was slightly puzzled by this sudden abstraction and quiescence in Barbara, but it was quite in keeping with her sensitive, impressionable nature that some chance word of his own had effected this change. From whatever cause it came, it pleased him. It separated her personality from the remembered insistent image of her mother; he spoke to her with far more freedom than was his wont. In after days Barbara often remembered those peaceful afternoons of spring. The weather had broken on the very night of their return; a week of rain had set in,—of soft sirocco rain and luminous

gray skies. Sometimes from her seat by the window she could see deep drifts of storm-darkened clouds blow blackly in from the Campagna.

"It will soon rain," she would say, her clear young voice breaking in upon their never-ending argument; and then perhaps Lexeter would stroll over to the window, and together, and with something of the same secret thrill of exultation, they would listen to the wild rush of the hail on the casement, and watch the reluctant swaying of the cypress-trees, defiant, if wind-shaken, against the livid sky.

In the lulls of the tempest Lexeter would look slowly and scrutinizingly about the room. There was not a detail in it with which he was not familiar, or which he would have changed. It was rather an ugly room, large and low-ceilinged, with faded gilding on the heavy cornices and faded crimson hangings. He had seen very different interiors in his London experience, but there was something about this which suited him. He liked the large shabby seats. There was a sofa in one corner on which no one ever sat, and a carved chair whose arm dropped off when one moved it abruptly. He liked these details; it seemed to him characteristically southern. He took pleasure in them as he took pleasure in watching Barbara move carelessly about the room, putting away her books, or passing her finger-tips caressingly over her flowers. Very often he did not speak to her for hours, and yet nothing could have deepened his conviction of the nobility and simplicity of her nature — and its good-

ness. Once, when she was consulting him about some book, he looked at her in such a way that she paused, astonished.

"I do not believe that you have heard a word of what I was saying, Mr. Lexeter."

"Not much, perhaps," he said, smiling a little; "but I like to hear you speak."

He took the volume from her hand, and glanced at it, and laid it on the table.

"I wish you would go on with that sewing stuff," he said discontentedly. "Let those books alone. Your work-basket humanizes the room."

She took up her work obediently and without an answer. She treated him with something of the affectionate trust she showed her father. The constant companionship of a man nearer her own age might have troubled her; between these two she felt so confident, so safe. Lalli had called more than once during that week; his visits were thoroughly commonplace, and each one left behind it the intense mental vision of some look—a word spoken to herself alone—which made a difference in all her day. He had asked for her friendship, but there was something ill-defined about the term. Once when she was putting some violets he had brought her into water, she had let a few of them fall. He had leaned down as if to pick up the flower at once, but he had given her nothing. She did not know if he had kept it, and the doubt brought a touch of color to her cheeks, and made the hand which held the flowers tremble. Lexeter noticed it at once. It was

unusual for him to remain there through one of Count Lalli's visits. "I do really believe Mr. Lexeter is jealous of poor Cesco," Octave suggested one day, with her pretty, innocent smile.

The two girls were alone together in the drawing-room after dinner.

"Jealous! Please don't say such things, dear," said Barbara, turning her head suddenly and looking at her.

Octave clasped her hands behind her curly head and looked up at the ceiling and smiled.

"How often has Mr. Lexeter been here this week?"

"Nearly every day. He comes to talk to papa about his books. I like Mr. Lexeter so much."

"So does" — she moved her head a little to one side and looked at Barbara, — "so does Mr. Hardinge. I don't think myself that he is — dangerous."

"Don't be wicked, Octave."

"Oh no! I should consider it a decided proof of his good taste if he were to fall in love with you. But he is too old for you, Baby. And he has n't any money. I don't believe he could marry if he wanted to. You know he writes for that newspaper."

"Yes; he told me so."

"Mr. Hardinge says he is immensely clever. I dare say his friends are all people who do things, and who expect you to admire them. But you would not mind that."

"Mind it? No! But, my dear child," said Barbara, looking down at her with an amused expression in her clear, grave eyes, "you are talking such extraor-

dinary nonsense. Why, Mr. Lexeter—" She took up a small glass of tea-roses from the mantelpiece and smelt them. "He brought me these to-day; wasn't it kind of him? Here! you may have that pink bud to put in your hair, although you don't deserve it. If you only saw more of him, I am sure you would like him as I do," she said quite calmly.

"Well, I don't know," said Octave doubtfully. "You are such a dear old simpleton. You believe what everybody tells you. And you are always wanting to do things for other people. Some day you will marry some man simply to oblige him, and he won't be a bit grateful to you for it, Barbara. You will be miserable, and he will feel it to be a criticism upon his own powers of entertainment. It will be very unpleasant."

Barbara laughed. "Poor man! I begin to feel sorry for him already. It will be quite a judgment upon him for being so grasping. And think what a bad housekeeper he will have! Tell me, Octave,—speaking seriously,—don't you think there is a little, just a little, improvement in that respect? I saw you looking at the salt-cellars," she said, smiling; "but all that severity was wasted. They are old, very old silver. That black is not meant to come off."

"Margherita certainly waits at table better," said Octave with a judicial little frown. "I think you have improved,—a little. You never, you know, will be what I call a good housekeeper."

"Ah, but you are so clever at things," said Barbara, looking at her affectionately.



"I should like to know," said Octave suddenly, "exactly what you think of Cesco Lalli?"

Barbara started. She put the glass of flowers she was holding carefully down; it struck against the edge of the mantelpiece with a clear ring.

"What do I think of — of Count Lalli?" she repeated.

"Yes, exactly what you think of him? Do you like him? Does he interest you? I know that he raves about you," said Octave carelessly; "but that counts for less. What I want to know is your opinion."

Barbara was silent.

"I suppose that you like him — since you have him to the house."

"I never asked him to come," said Barbara quickly.

"But you like him, nevertheless?"

"Oh, — I don't know. I wish you would not tease me so," said Barbara, with a sudden, sharp movement of irritation.

The words had hardly passed her lips before she began to regret them. For how was it possible now to offer any calm explanation of her compact of friendship with Lalli which should not sound like an apology? She stood irresolutely, fingering the fringe of the mantelpiece, for a minute or two, and then she walked over to the window and looked out. There was no curtain, and the wooden shutters were open. She looked out on a dark and starry sky. The wind seemed to have changed; the clouds were high and thin, and drifting to the south. She leaned her fore-

head against the cool glass. It was too late; it was impossible to explain things now to Octave. She was conscious of feeling a certain sense of relief at this thought. She shrank instinctively from any voice which might give the definiteness, the irrevocable quality, of a spoken word to her inward impulse and apprehension. Already she felt that the charm of unconsciousness was broken, and was there not something cowardly, something ungenerous towards Lalli in this hesitation about pronouncing herself? Octave would not understand, that was obvious. But if he had been questioned in her place — She faced about quickly.

"Octave!"

"Ah," said Miss Damon sleepily, "I was thinking about Lent."

She sat up and passed her hand once or twice over her hair. Her hands were the poorest thing about her; they were large and not well shaped, and her wrists were too thin.

"Ash Wednesday is on the twentieth this year, Barbara." She hesitated and looked grave. "I wish I could get you to come to early service."

"Oh," said Barbara, with something between a laugh and a sob; "why not? I don't mind."

She turned again to her window. She was relieved, but at the same time she felt checked and baffled. The very lightness with which Octave had changed the subject was like a tacit reproach. "I was going to say something rather different — something more important — at least I think so." She felt the blood rush to her cheeks.

"Nothing could be more important than early service," began Octave, in her clear, imperative treble, and then the dining-room door opened and the gentlemen came in. Mr. Lexeter and Walter Hardinge were both dining there that evening. They were both in particularly good spirits. They stayed late. About nine o'clock Mr. Clifford Dix was announced. He seemed a little surprised at first, and then chagrined at finding himself only one of a large party.

"I did not know that this was your reception-night, Miss Floyd," he said, as he got up to take a cup of tea from Barbara.

"Will you have cream and sugar? We never have any reception-nights, you know. Only sometimes people happen to call," she said, glancing over at the clock.

He observed that she was looking a little pale; she smiled, but her eyes remained troubled. He saw her look at the clock; was she expecting any one who had not come? He put down his tea-cup with a slight feeling of annoyance. He turned about on his chair and began to contradict Lexeter. Presently some one asked Octave to sing. She rose at once, and Hardinge followed her over to the piano.

"Sing something that I know, or at least that I can understand," he said.

She looked down at her own fingers resting idly on the keys; she hesitated for an instant, and then she began playing a low, monotonous accompaniment. She lifted up her face a little and began to sing. Hardinge crossed his arms on the top of the piano

and looked down at her. Her voice was a singularly true and flexible soprano, of no particular strength, but of very great compass. Her higher notes were particularly good,—clear, piercingly sweet, and unstrained, like a bird's. When she sung her face became more serious. She turned her eyes towards Hardinge between two of the verses, and her glance met his. She colored suddenly and violently, and bent her head down with a quick movement of her round white throat. He could see the half-opened rosebud stuck carelessly in her hair, and it seemed hardly more flower-like than her face at that moment with this sudden flush of color passing like a wave under the delicate and transparent skin.

The song she had selected was the old "Stornello Pisano." The monotonous, familiar air, — monotonous as passion, — the wild directness of the words, seemed to awaken a hundred new instincts in Barbara, to quiet a hundred doubts. For years after she could never hear the brave old Italian words without the keenest pang of remembrance. It came to her like a gallant and devoted appeal, which stirred profoundly the more chivalric issues of her spirit. She rose with quite another expression on her face, to take part in the conversation which followed Octave's singing. When Miss Damon had gone into the next room to put on her hat, Barbara accompanied her; she looked at her quite simply as she said, —

"You wanted to know about Count Lalli. Well, I have been thinking about him, and I am sure — that is, I think — I mean I hope we shall see a great

deal of him. Do you know, Octave, poor fellow ! he has almost no friends. All his old comrades are gone, either home again with the French troops, — you know, he has been intimate with so many Frenchmen, — or they have taken service with the Italians, and that he will not do. I can understand that. At first I thought it was a mistake on his part, but now, — don't you see how fine it is to be living up to all one's own old beliefs and purposes, when everything else has changed and crumbled away about you ? I think ” — her voice lowered a little, and she put her hand suddenly up to her lips — “ I think there is something heroic in that,” she said.

“ My dear child, the man has places in the country to look after, — his *tenuta* ; have you never heard him speak of that ? The Lalli family are like half the other Romans,” said Octave carelessly, looking in the glass and adjusting her hat, “ his grandfather — Cesco's grandfather — the one who was made a count by the Pope — began it, and since then they have always kept those farms. He has another place, you know, near Bracciano.”

She put her head on one side and smiled, and hummed a few notes of the “ Stornello.”

“ This has been such a pleasant evening,” she said, showing all her dimples. “ So you and Cesco are going to be great friends, Miss Barbara, eh ? I thought as much. But oh, Barbara, was not Mr. Dix amusing ? I will tell you something your Mr. Lexeter said to him ; they were talking about modern novels, and Mr. Lexeter said that in English novels the

characters all seem to be walking about in their ulsters, they are so thick, and practical, and material ; but in American books they are like so many *écorchés*. They are all so beautifully dissected and demonstrated, they have not even their natural skin. I don't think Mr. Dix quite liked it."

She finished fastening her cloak, and put up her smooth cheek to be kissed.

" Good-night."

But at the door she turned and looked back.

" Barbara."

" Well, dear ?"

" Try and not make Mr. Lexeter too jealous, won't you ?"

" Try and not be too absurd, won't you ?" said Barbara, smiling, and looking at her with her chin resting upon her clasped hands. She sat so for a long while after Octave had left her. The house was perfectly still ; the lamp burned steadily upon the table ; from time to time a wilder gust of wind sent a sudden dash of rain against the window. When she raised her head at last her eyes were more brilliant than usual. She got up from her seat and began walking rather quickly up and down the room ; her hands were clasped together with the arms thrust straight down ; her head was thrown a little back ; the long train of her white dress followed her steps with a quick, soft rustle ; the whole expression of her being was one of eagerness and readiness, — an ignorant, devoted readiness to meet the claims of any future.

It was, I believe, the very next day that she called

upon Miss Maclean with Mr. Lexeter. They had met accidentally upon the Corso, near Miss Maclean's door. The wind had fallen again, the weather had changed, the sky overhead was of an uniform silvery gray, with here and there a darker, loosely floating cloud; the air had suddenly turned warm and soft; half the people they met were wearing flowers, and shallow baskets heaped with dark violets were being offered for sale at every street corner. They had walked along for some little distance together, and then, —

"I am going in here to see Miss Maclean," Barbara said, stopping. She held out her hand. "But wait; don't you want to come with me? They are such dear old ladies. Come in, and Miss Janet will get her sister to play to you; and it will be such a pleasure for them to see a new face."

"Oh, but I never make calls, you know," said Lexeter in a protesting voice, and then, and much to Margherita's dissatisfaction, he followed her slowly, but resignedly, up the many stairs. Margherita objected to Mr. Lexeter. If it had been a tall, straight, gallant-looking young man like Count Lalli, now, or even like that other young *forestiere*, this one's friend! But a man of at least five-and-thirty, with a decided halt in his walk! She looked at him with the severe personal criticism of a Roman; but, then, if he were rich? Providence had a quite unaccountable way of providing these hard-visaged, dull-eyed foreigners with money.

Miss Maclean and her sister Miss Janet were two

of Barbara's greatest friends. She had often spoken of them to Lexeter; he was quite prepared for their precise and formal welcome. He saw Barbara take one white-haired old lady after the other by the hand and kiss her soft withered cheek; the smile which lighted up their placid, high-bred faces pleased him; he listened with a certain curiosity and interest to their quaint and gentle speech.

The whole character of the little drawing-room accorded well with its inhabitants. They seemed lifted away here from any contact with the actual world; here, at least, life implied neither haste, nor uncertainty, nor forgetfulness. The calm of a faithful habit was all about them like the air they breathed. Everything had its own place and its own remembrance; there was not a speck of dust on any of the curious bits of china, on the faded Indian screens, the small blackened frames of the round, old-fashioned mirrors, the group of faded miniatures hanging in their accustomed circle by Miss Maclean's own, tall and straight-backed chair.

"The portrait in the centre is that of our father," the old lady said in her thin, gracious old voice, seeing Lexeter's eyes turn in that direction.

It was a small oval miniature representing a young man with a smiling face and melancholy brown eyes, dressed in the costume of the last century. He wore a white rose in the lapel of his high rolling collar.

"Taken at Paris, at the age of twenty, when our father was a page in the service of His Majesty, Charles Edward," said Miss Janet, rising briskly and



coming forward ; " and that bonnie lassie on the other side is my sister Elizabeth, painted in Highland costume as she went to her first ball. Dear, dear, to think how I can remember that evening ! I was a bit of a bairn in the nursery still, and Elizabeth was ten years older. Dear, dear, how I did envy her going out. And that is sixty years ago."

" But is n't it a lovely portrait, Mr. Lexeter ? And I always think that one can see the likeness now," said Barbara, looking from the slim, smiling girl in the miniature to the proud-faced old lady with the silvery hair.

" Ah, but you'll not see such beauties now as my sister Elizabeth," said Miss Janet briskly, with a triumphant smile on her own dear honest work-a-day face. " I mind me yet of the way the young men crowded about her at the Duchess's ball, at Brussels, the night before Waterloo. Dear, dear, and to think how all those bonny lads went marching away the next morning ; and Elizabeth up there on the balcony looking at them, still in her ball-dress and with a red flower in her hair. Dear, dear, and how they did turn their heads to look up at her as they went marching by with their music playing. And there was many a one of them that the last thing he remembered, poor laddie, will have been that last look at my sister Elizabeth."

" Have done, Janet, ye silly woman," Miss Maclean said rebukingly. She folded her beautiful old hands together complacently, and looked at Lexeter with a faint conscious color in her soft old cheeks. " Here

you are, chattering like a magpie about the beauty of an old woman in a cap, and all the while that feckless lass, Jessie, has never offered our visitors so much as a drop or a crumb. I think shame of your carelessness, sister."

"Dear, dear; to think that I should have forgotten," said Miss Janet penitently, trotting away briskly on her willing old feet.

She returned presently, followed by a squarely built, middle-aged woman, whose honest hard-featured face lighted up with a broad smile at sight of Barbara.

"Eh, but it is a gude sight to see our young lady here again, Miss Elizabeth. Whiles I thocht you had clean forgotten us," she said.

"Come, come, Jessie; put the tray down, woman, and don't fill Miss Barbara's head with nonsense," said Miss Janet sharply.

She poured out the wine herself into the small old-fashioned glasses. Lexeter detested sweet wine, but he drank it submissively. The room was warm and smelt vaguely of lavender and spices. Miss Janet had a small withered apple stuck all over with cloves in the square embroidered bag which hung by its faded ribbon from the arm of her straight-backed chair. One of the windows looked out on the Corso; it was half filled up with flowering plants in pots.

"Your roses always get on so much better than mine," Barbara said, looking at them.

The noise of the street was only a confused murmur at this height. The small smouldering fire

burned discreetly upon the immaculate hearthstone, without a flame or a sound. The two old ladies sat in their accustomed seats on either side of the fireplace, looking with gentle expectancy at their guests; every line of their fine old faces expressed a feeling of pleased hospitality and calm. A stray gleam of watery sunlight passing over the little row of faded portraits was like another pale smile of welcome, — an invitation to rest in the profound serenity of these blameless lives.

“Dear Miss Janet, I wonder if you would show Mr. Lexeter your precious glove?” said Barbara.

It was Miss Elizabeth who kept the keys. Once, ten or fifteen years before, a political refugee had spent a day and a night concealed in their peaceful house. It was Miss Elizabeth who had protected him. “What! would ye turn the man out to be taken by his enemies?” the proud old lady had said when the other women had hesitated, appalled by the danger they were running. “Is that your Highland hospitality? And have you forgotten what was done for Maclean of Mull, in the Forty-five, when he too had to go into his hiding? I think shame for you, Janet,” said the old Highland woman.

With her own trembling hand she prepared the fugitive’s supper. They kept him for a day and a night, until he could communicate with his friends; a poor cowering wretch he was; a mere shop lad implicated in some foolish conspiracy; but they waited on him themselves with their own hands; Miss Janet pale and tearful, but following her sister’s lead with-

out the thought of a remonstrance; and gave him money out of their own scanty store. He had left some compromising papers behind him, treasonable documents, which they hid deep in their linen-chest, under the folds of their fine, worn old clothes. The dangerous documents were there still; they had never disturbed them. Many a night Miss Janet had thought of them, lying timidly awake, hearing the heavy step of a Papal gendarme in every sound of the wind upon the creaking stair. But they had never thought of burning them,—the old Jacobite instinct was too strong for that.

"It is not the first secret the Macleans have held fast," Miss Elizabeth would say proudly, turning her old white head to look at her father's miniature upon the wall.

Miss Janet had never forgotten her sister's conduct on that occasion. The plot was outlawed now; its object—the very name of the conspirators—forgotten. But they had never troubled themselves about that. "What we keep we hold fast," had said the brave old lady. The papers still were safely locked away, in company of old letters, old manuscript books, old memoranda, old flowers and locks of hair,—a whole host of dusty memories, loves, hopes, defeats.

Miss Maclean took out her keys now. She unlocked a wooden box; inside there was a glass cover, and under it, fastened to a piece of crimson velvet, a small embroidered glove.

"This was Queen Mary's glove; she wore it on her flight from Holyrood. She gave it to the chief of the

Macleans — for good service rendered," the silvery-haired, placid lady said proudly enough.

They all looked at it with a curious eagerness. What a reward — and for what gallant service !

"Have you been living many years in Rome, Miss Maclean ?" Lexeter asked respectfully.

"Five-and-twenty years this last time. Our father died here when we were girls. He never left Italy after the death of the Cardinal of York," said Miss Janet briskly. "We came back in the Forty-five, I always tell my sister," she said, with her sweet old smile.

Before they left, Barbara begged Miss Maclean to play for them. "There is nothing," said Miss Janet, "like the Highland music my sister Elizabeth plays."

"Dear Miss Janet," said Barbara, "I want to show Mr. Lexeter your beautiful view. And indeed it has quite stopped raining. May I open the balcony-window a moment ?"

"Surely, my lassie."

They stepped out upon the narrow iron balcony together. It was at the turn of the afternoon. Recent showers had left the wall glistening wet and mottled with rose-red spots, against which the green of the little stone-plants, growing between the bricks, was fresh and vivid like a jewel. Far down below them was the sunless, well-like court ; a woman was drawing up some water ; they could distinguish the rattle of the chain. They were looking across a world of curious huddled roof-tops, unexpected silhouettes, a confusion of fantastic chimney-pots, and high *loggie*,

and the dark tops of the convent cypresses. Beyond this was the river. It had stopped raining; the sky was almost blue in places. The air blew soft and coolly after the closeness of the fire-heated room. There was a distinct movement among the great, floating masses of clouds overhead; a sudden dazzle of light burst at the horizon, and mounted up, pillar-like, above the mist-covered plain. A few large, warm drops of rain fell; they glistened on Barbara's cheek, and touched Lexeter's bare hands, but neither of them thought of going in. The potent, ineffable charm of the spring was upon them. They were both silent. And still the music went on, — a wild and plaintive strain. The old Highland woman began bravely enough with the gallant, stirring, cavalier airs, such as her sister loves. How is it now that the old white head is bending lower over the keys, and what memory of her youth is stirring as her fingers wander into the sad, wild song of the dying, "Oran an Aoig," the lament of the battle-field? To Lexeter this afternoon has been like a revelation of inviolate and soothing calm. This quiet household of women, living in an atmosphere of old romantic memories, unknown and undisturbed of the world, was like the very sanctuary of peace. He looked out over the crowded life of Rome, and the confused, murmur of the city streets died away a meaningless murmur at his feet. The charm of long continuance was upon him; the absence of expectation; the unaspiring peace which passeth understanding. His thoughts went back to the old stories he had been hearing, to that line of

faded miniatures — so many years of life, and all to end here! His restless, unsatisfied spirit was stricken dumb in presence of this calm, this placid acceptance and forgetfulness.

Forgetfulness! but what heart forgets? What passion wholly dies? What past is not the sharpest accent of the present? The music went bravely on through the tranquil twilight. The player's head was white and tremulous, but the ghosts of half a century back were communing with her spirit. When Miss Janet lifted her gentle old eyes from the smouldering embers, it was with a great awe and tenderness that she saw the trace of tears upon her sister's cheek.

The sun was setting now behind St. Peter's, and the clouds which lay in horizontal folds above the hills were tinged with a dull coppery red. The river ran pale beneath its heavy bridges; the pines of the Pamphili Gardens seemed a darker procession than ever against the colorless sky.

"I must go," said Barbara, moving her arms from the balustrade upon which she had been leaning.

As they were shaking hands at the street door, Lexeter stopped her for a moment. He wanted to consult about the fittest day to choose for going to Ostia on horseback as they had already planned. It flashed across her mind once or twice to ask him if he intended to invite Count Lalli. But they parted without mentioning his name. She had assured him that she would be his friend, and in all good faith she had believed it; but there was something about Lalli which repulsed while it excited her imagination.

Abstractly considered, she was very sorry for him; he preoccupied her. She quite unconsciously endowed him with a depth and tenacity of emotion which was her own, not his. She thought of him as suffering. "At least one can be silent," he had told her on that first night of their meeting; and the phrase had opened before her a world in which she had felt fervently alive, — eager for loving service. She had been moved with a sense of surprise — a delicious thrill of triumph — by the consciousness of his admiration and liking; and yet, for all that, she was ever dimly aware that should any insurmountable circumstance arise now — without delay — to separate them, her feeling of regret would not be unmingled with a sense of relief. The realization of this feeling was like a lowering brand of ingratitude. She would allow herself no opportunity of influencing Lexeter. She knew that if he invited the count it would be entirely from an idea of giving her pleasure; and as she walked slowly homeward her mind was filled with a certain scorn of her own selfish weakness.

When Lope de Vegas and his men first exchanged their glass beads for the gold-dust of the Indians, it is quite possible there may have been some among the natives afflicted with this same generous shame at the disproportion of their return for those glittering gifts.



## CHAPTER VII.

AND of course Lalli went. They were a party of seven or eight when they finally started, — Mrs. Damon and Mr. Floyd in a carriage by themselves. It was a warm gray day ; from time to time the flickering, tempered sunlight gleamed through the softly unquiet mass of clouds ; wherever the wild, soft wind parted that silvery radiance, the sky seen through these rifts was of the faintest blue.

There is, properly speaking, no beginning of spring on the Roman Campagna. In September the land lies dying, — a blank expanse, fever-stricken, burnt to the heart, and very still. The skies are paler above it ; the earth is cracking in long, shuddering gaps ; the blanched lines of aqueduct seem more than ever organic, — the natural culmination of the desert, — and there is no coolness in their heavy shadow. The shepherds have gone to the hills ; and the few horsemen who pass here at long intervals ride by muffled in cloaks, pallid-faced, and shivering in the sun. An implacable, hungry-eyed spectre sits crowned and solitary among these ruins ; the blood-red sunsets do him tribute ; a pæan of unclean triumph rises in his honor, hoarse and ceaseless, from the pestilent pools of the Pontine Marsh ; and at night the monotonous

creak of the cicala's voice is like the dry, persistent delirium of a fevered thirst.

The land dies, but in the night there is resurrection. The full autumnal rains sweep down in wild white gusts, with sighing winds — stern white-winged angels of deliverance — born of the sea and mountains. A hundred small green lives awaken in the sheltered side of ruins; the earth grows ruddy; in December the strong-lipped daisies are red and white everywhere beneath the stubble of last year's asphodel. This same stubble is the surest measure of the passing seasons. On the coldest tramontane day, when the blue of the sky is hard like enamel, when the sheep huddle closer together, and the immutable ilexes writhe, dark and desperate, in the icy clutch of the wind, these bare, delicate stalks are like a warm, rosy flush running above the foldings of the ground. Flowers are continually springing up beneath this ghostly shelter, — small pale crocuses, blue-veined and low; yellow marigolds; and strangely colored orchids, dull in hue and faintly perfumed, like the grotesque tenement of a beautiful soul. By the end of January, when the warmer rains have washed these mouldering stems into the pale brown earth, the violets are blooming everywhere in the villas, and out here, on this perfumeless waste, a yellow mist of delicate wild turnip-flowers bends and dances in the wind. In another week or so the first almond-tree will blossom palely behind some sheltered convent wall; already the Campagna has lost its noble monotone of color; the long lifting lines of plain are green beneath the grayer

olives of the hills ; the sweet impatience of the flowers stars all the lanes and hedgerows while yet the trees are budding, and the white foam of blossoms breaks over a summery land and beneath a summer sky.

As they rode down to Ostia this morning it was difficult to say precisely when and where this demarcation of the seasons had been overpast. There were rose-red peach-trees clustering against the gray walls of the city ; the small young leaves overhead were of a pale shining green ; the fragrant freshness of early morning blew in their faces as they trotted sharply along over the soft damp ground.

And now they had walked their horses down the hill by the Basilica, and saw the river running broadly between low-lying fields. The empty road followed the lonely Tiber. The larks sang all about them in the meadows, and the delicious floating odor of wild-growing plants ("that comes and goes like the warbling of music") was on the air. It was a day for all delicate effects of color. Once — the wind had loosened the clouds, the gray vapor floated languidly against a sky of pale and limpid blue — they passed a solitary shepherd, a Campagna shepherd, dressed in rough skins, and leaning on his staff. All about him his sheep were feeding in the transparent shadow of a cloud, while beyond them, to the river's verge, the fields were afire with yellow marsh flowers, — a resplendent sea of gold. And once, looking down a wet and narrow lane, crowded, as far as one could see, with a huddled flock of sheep, the sunlight touched the woolly backs to a winding silvery streak ; on either

side brown banks, and overhead the delicate shining stems of poplar-trees. It was an impression like listening to the sound of flutes, — clear, thin, silvery, evanescent.

Barbara had checked her horse for an instant, lingering behind the others to look at this; when she turned her head Hardinge was waiting for her.

"Do you think that they are standing so expressly for your pleasure?" he said, smiling at the look of delight that was shining in her eyes. "Miss Floyd, I know that you are possessed by a perfectly irrational desire to give that man something. You are conspiring against the fundamental rule of good government; you are establishing an arbitrary system of rewards. Admit, now, that you have been regretting that you had not your purse with you?"

"Well —" began Barbara, looking down and playing with the reins between her fingers.

Hardinge laughed.

"Fortunately Lexeter is out of sight. Political economy is supposed to be my strong point at Oxford, Miss Floyd." He took some loose silver from his pocket and tossed it cleverly enough into the shepherd's hat. "And there is nothing like acting up to one's principles," he said.

Why is it that some casual look or tone will fix itself upon the memory until that and that only will grow to represent the person who uttered it? Barbara had met this young man a dozen times already, but she never forgot his look as he spoke those few careless words, — the kindly look in his eyes as he

turned in his saddle with the sun and the wind in his face.

A big white cloud floated by overhead and covered them with its shadow. Beyond, the larks were singing in the sunny water-meadows. The horses stamped impatiently upon the soft earth, and fretted and pulled at their bridles.

"Shall we ride on?" Hardinge suggested.

They began speaking of England, then of Oxford.

"I shall go back there in the autumn to take my degree," Hardinge said; "and then I go home. It is four years since I left America."

"Then you will not come back to Rome again," she said, a slight touch of disappointment crossing her mind at the idea.

"I don't know. I am like Adam after the fall. The world is all before me where to choose," he made answer, smiling and touching his horse's neck with the end of his whip. "My habits lie here; only it is an article of faith with me to go home."

"After Oxford?"

"Ah, that was a mistake undoubtedly. One stands over on this side and listens, and one is fairly deafened by the clamorous culture of America. And then your true American never admits superiority, which would naturally seem to exclude one's self. And yet," he said, looking at her again, "I fancy they will make a place for me."

"But what are you going to do, really?"

"Oh, reform the universe."

"I do not see any particular reason why you should

not be successful," said Barbára, with an answering smile.

"I see none myself. Lexeter would say that therein lies the essence of all failure. I disagree with him."

"Oh, but you will not fail," she said rather earnestly. "I don't mean about reforming the world and all that, but in whatever you attempt to do. I think there are some people who are born so. They are in harmony with the world from the beginning. That is why they are useful—and delightful," she added quite simply.

"And you yourself; which planet do you belong to, Miss Floyd?"

"Oh, I am out of tune very often. Incompatible things attract me, and I am always surprising myself by finding out the necessity of what I did not mean to do. And then other people call you inconsistent."

"Ah yes; those terrible other people," said Hardinge quietly. "I think I shall begin by suppressing *them*. Not that I exactly agree with you about them. I understand what you mean, but I never could see why it should be such a source of misery to be out of harmony, as you call it, with the ideas which influence Tom, Dick, and Harry. The whole object of life does not seem to me to be cohesion, and the advancing of business. Really, unless one is a predestined muff, I do not see why the fact that all one's neighbors are out of sympathy with one should not tell chiefly against one's neighbors? I am tired of social cement, and the rubbish that is talked about

the enthusiasm for humanity. If I see a man in trouble and help him, why is that not enough? I don't see why his claim upon my benevolence is to interfere in any degree with my right to consider him a fool."

He looked at her again. He saw her face in profile. The sun was shining upon her delicate cheek and lips, and on the soft fine hair at her temples. She wore a low-crowned felt hat which gave her something of the air of a young boy.

"I know that you do not agree with me," he said.

They were walking the horses up a little hill. It was at the edge of the wood, the larks were still singing by the river in the flat sunny meadows, but near at hand an indistinct humming sound, the voice of insects, the dry tapping of bare branches, and the rustle of small leaves rose about them. There was a sudden smell of the earth and the warm heavy odor of beds of young fern in the sun.

"I do not see the use of living unless one can care for the people about one," said Barbara a little slowly. Her eyes were cast down, and she was apparently examining the buckle of her reins.

"I did not say one was not to care for people. I draw the distinction between people and their opinions. And I do not see how life could not be worth the wear and tear to one's temper of living. Why, merely as a naturalist, one would find humanity interesting," said Hardinge, smiling. He looked about him, and took off his hat, and let the wind blow upon his resolute sun-browned face. "And there is all

this beside," he said, glancing around him comprehensively. They were drawing nearer to Ostia. From the crest of the hill they overlooked a waving expanse of reeds, — the first indication of the Marsh. To the left, that dark matted line of tree-tops was the beginning of the Castle Fusano woods. On the right a tall gray tower rose, bare and solitary, above the crowded and sterile life of the Marsh. They looked across the tangled tops of a forest of brushwood, of myrtle chiefly, and Phillyrea, bay-trees, and here and there a stunted ilex, its branches dragged and bowed by the salt winds of many winters — a mass of grays and ruddy browns streaked and spotted with green. Beyond that, low at the horizon, was a still and glittering sea. The round, massive outline of the castle of Ostia rested heavily against this motionless field of light.

It was only for a moment, then they re-entered the wood. They rode on. They joined the others of the party. Lexeter had some white narcissi in his hand.

"They are the first I have seen this year," he said, and gave them to Barbara.

"Thanks!"

She put them in her dress and looked down at them, and touched the white stars softly with her fingers. Lalli was watching her from the other side of the road. He had a curious expression on his face which struck Barbara the instant she looked at him. She turned her head to speak to him, and felt suddenly embarrassed.

"Count Lalli —" she said.



He checked his horse abruptly, hesitated, and then brought him across the road.

"You wanted me?"

"Oh, it was nothing particular," said Barbara quickly. She heard Hardinge's voice behind her, and, a moment after, Octave's laugh. They were not ten yards away from her, but she had all the sensation of being irrevocably excluded. "Are you — are you tired? Are not these flowers lovely?" she said, putting up her hand to the white blossoms in her breast.

Lalli stared at her fixedly for a moment, and the same singular contraction passed over his features.

"So that is what you wanted?" he said abruptly.

He laughed, and threw back his head. His nostrils quivered and whitened. "I am not a judge of flowers. Ask Mr. Lexeter," he said indistinctly between his clenched teeth. She hardly understood the words, but there was no mistaking the look which he threw at her, as he turned sharply about and struck his spurs into his horse. The animal was a quiet enough Roman hack, not unaccustomed to strange theoretic riding, but this was surely a more wanton affront than usual. Lalli was an exceptionally good horseman, but for a minute or two there was a very pretty little struggle for mastery upon the stones of the sunny causeway.

"What the deuce! steady there, Miss Damon! Shall we charitably imagine that our Italian friend has gone mad? or what is the meaning of this piece of circus riding, Miss Floyd?" said Hardinge, riding up to her with a smile.

"I don't know," said Barbara quickly. Her eyes were cast down. Her face was quite pale.

They were entering the Marsh. A paved road stretches straight and white across it. The blue-green reeds rose straight and sharp, like an army of spears, as far as the eye could see. At the first glance the plain presented the aspect of a solid field of rushes; looking more closely, one was aware of openings in this greenness,—the sunlight glittered upon water, and the mind realized with a shock that all this thick-set show of verdure is in fact the merest covering for the lagoon. Denuded of vegetation, the Stagno would be desolate; in its pestilential luxuriance it becomes terrible. The hidden water suggests treachery. In the mid-day silence there are inexplicable disturbances,—quick, sudden darting and struggling deep down under cover of the rushes,—dumb indications of strange and repulsive forms of life,—the life of slime and obscurity and secrecy. The mind follows these furtive movements with a fascinated disgust, imagining all curious tragedies of lower creations,—wild, crippled sea-birds dragging themselves painfully about under shelter,—fierce battle for existence between snake and frog and newt.

At mid-day this expression of a crowded sterility is at its highest. In the early morning there are mists hanging about the horizon; at sunset a whiter exhalation rises slowly, the chill forerunner of fever and slow death; darkness covers it; at night the stars are reflected in a thousand motionless pools. But at

mid-day the Marsh asserts itself. In the perfectly clear air the straight reeds glitter like sword-blades with a pitiless distinctness. The sea is silenced. The dim sunlight presses heavily down upon an absolutely changeless form of desolation. In the winter these reeds will be stiff and dry, blanched and rattling in the restless sea-wind. All the power of the summer can only modify their color to a barren bloom. In a hundred years the Marsh will not have altered by an inch. The whole character of the waste implies immutability. The handful of peasants, half-naked and silent, toiling along that sand-bank to the right, are workers in the salt mines founded by Marcus Antius twenty-five centuries ago. That blanched and solitary tower is the campanile Dante chose as resting-place for weary shades waiting to be ferried over to the melancholy shores of Purgatory. The hoarse, lugubrious croaking of the frogs rises eternally like the malign rejoicing of all the lower powers of evil over this barren fulfilment of some primeval curse.

For a few steps outside the town there were shattered capitals of columns, fragments of headless statues lying among the thistles by the road. They went in under a massive stone gateway all covered over with deeply carved scutcheon and device. There was a bare paved courtyard inside, and a small and unpromising inn. The horses' feet clattered noisily over the stones; an old woman came and looked at them out of an upper window, and pulled the rude shutter close with a bang. They were so near the battle-

mented tower of the castle they could distinctly distinguish the slight stirring of the wind among the stiff blue-green masses of wormwood crowning the bastion. Nothing else seemed alive in all the desolate place.

They had all dismounted; the horses were standing together with drooping heads. Lalli alone had remained in the saddle; he was taking his horse up and down a short bit of the road, putting him through all his paces, and apparently deriving some pleasure from the restive resistance he met with.

"What is Count Lalli doing?" asked Octave innocently, pulling off her glove.

The two young men looked at each other and did not answer.

"I thought that we were to meet mamma and Mr. Floyd?"

"Oh, they have gone on to the woods with the trap, and the luncheon too, worse luck."

"Just look after those horses, Lexeter, there's a good fellow. We shall have them all imitating that idiot out there before we know where we are," said Hardinge in a low voice. He walked over to the stable-door and looked in. "Hallo! I say, wake up there, can't you? I'll be hanged, Lexeter, if there are not two stablemen in here, and the beggars fast asleep."

"And what comes next? Are there not ruins or something?" said Octave, gayly rolling up her gloves together and tossing them into the air like a ball. "It is really a most dreadful spectacle to see you lose your temper in that way, Mr. Hardinge. Why should not

stablemen sleep? *I* should — I should sleep all day long if I were living in this awful place; and then I suppose you would be enraged at me?" looking at Hardinge with a sudden dimple in each cheek. She rose from the stone on which she had been sitting, and flicked some dust from her habit with the end of her whip. "And oh, Barbara, what would you give for a drink of milk — delicious, cool new milk — before we start?" she said.

The ruins of the old town are at a distance of some ten minutes' walk down the road. They strolled there leisurely across a low grassy plain. The temperate sunshine filled the air with a pleasant warmth, they crushed wild thyme beneath their footsteps as they sauntered idly over the short, warm grass; the wind tasted salt upon their lips, blowing across the wide-mouthed Tiber from the sea. They came upon the paved and shadowless street; on either hand, low brick-built houses; there were flowers and small green plants growing in the crevices, and shy brown lizards basking upon the sunny stones, worn into deep ruts from the long pressure of old chariot wheels. At the end of each street was the same expanse of brown river, low horizon, and flat and empty marsh.

The soft white clouds floated by overhead against a sky of summer blue. It was a day for lying down on grassy plains, for idle talk, and the satisfaction of living in the sun. They had wandered down through many ruined courts to the foot of a small, open-air altar. Octave seated herself upon its lower step. She took off her hat, the wind ruffled her curly hair upon

her forehead, she threw back her head, and her delicate throat and chin looked more flower-like than ever against that background of gray stones.

"I suppose you know that that was one of the altars to Pan. Some fellow was telling me about having been down here when they uncovered the mosaic inscription," said Lexeter lazily, clasping his hands behind his head.

"You mean Davids, I suppose?" said Hardinge, glancing at Octave.

He picked up a small glittering fragment of glass grown iridescent from long burial, turned it over curiously in his hand for a moment, and threw it carelessly at the nearest lizard. It fell wide of its mark and struck Barbara lightly on the wrist. She started and looked up.

"I beg your pardon," the young man said, smiling; "I did not mean to begin stoning you. It is an appropriate place for a martyrdom; but I did not mean to make a martyr of you."

"St. Monica died here," said Octave, smelling at a flower. "I've seen a picture of her at Ostia; or a print."

"You mean Ary Scheffer's picture. St. Monica and St. Augustine sitting at 'a curtain window'?" said Lexeter. "I know it. Ary Scheffer is a bore."

"Mr. Lexeter!"

"I will tell you something better than that. All the great Roman expeditions sailed from here. Scipio Africanus — I always thought he was a little like you, Hardinge — started from Ostia for Spain. I believe

he started from those very steps where Miss Floyd is sitting."

"Of course," said Barbara, lifting up her clear eyes, and smiling at him.

"And Cæsar Borgia — am I right in saying that there are traits in common between him and Lexeter?"

"Thanks."

"Don't mention it, old fellow. Cæsar Borgia was imprisoned in the castle over there. I wonder how he liked it?" said Hardinge; "I was sorry he never left us his opinion of the Marsh. It reminds me of him," the young man said, turning his eyes towards the flat and shining fen.

"A pleasant suggestion for Mr. Lexeter!"

"Oh, those fifteenth-century fellows had the pull over us in one thing. At least they were individualities," said Lexeter, pulling his hat down over his eyes; "and they knew exactly what they wanted. It is a great privilege to be born unscrupulous. We don't do that sort of thing well nowadays. Modern unscrupulousness is merely vulgarity — the hankering after other people's goods and chattels — or brute selfishness. At the best our mental freedom is purely relative, bounded on all sides by religious fragments and traditional ditches, — like horses turned out in a paddock to graze until it is time to put them into harness. I know there is Hardinge, for instance, who has all sorts of ideas about moral independence, and all that kind of thing. Wait! Some day, some woman or other will come to the gate of the paddock

with a neat little halter; up trots Hardinge, hereditary instincts and all, and the end of that man —”

“Is worse than the beginning? Wait!” said Hardinge cheerfully, looking up at Octave with a smile. “I may turn out as untractable as Count Lalli’s refractory steed.”

“Ah, poor Cesco! But I wonder what has become of him, you know,” said Octave, with her quick transparent blush.

“You see — I know very well you don’t agree with me — but don’t you see yourself how this morbid modern scrupulousness runs through every act and feeling, and spoils the more impulsive part of it? Why, take those two lines of Matthew Arnold,” said Lexeter, turning to Barbara; “don’t you remember, where he is telling the girl that he loves how

A sea rolls between us  
Our different past?

Now is there any mood one can understand more easily? Have we not, each one of us, experienced it at one time or another? It is perfectly sincere sentiment. But will you try to imagine what a Cæsar Borgia, what a fifteenth-century Italian, would have made out of that? And take the commonest everyday experiences. Suppose — suppose a man wants to marry a girl, and has no money. Of course men without money are a blunder, upon the face of things; we all know that. But hath not a Jew also feelings?”

“But I thought Jews *always* had money,” said



Octave, arching her delicate eyebrows and looking at him.

Hardinge laughed. A cloud passed over the sun. He took off his hat and threw it down beside him on the short thyme-sweetened grass.

"I must say I agree with you there, Lexeter. The tendency is to complicate things quite unnecessarily. Imagine, for instance, — well, let us say marrying a foreigner; a representative of alien traditions and influences. Can you not conceive how, after a while, all the little variations which attracted one would come to symbolize the most dividing differences? I never could marry any woman, — not in spite of your neat little allegory, Lexeter, — no woman, no, not if I adored her," the young man said, laughing, — "no woman who had not associations with the rhymes of Mother Goose."

It was the mere idle talk of a summer day. Barbara sat listening to it, pulling the short grass up by its roots and looking at it before she threw it away.

"Ah, there is Count Lalli at last. The horse is conquered," said Octave suddenly, lifting up her head.

They could see him a long distance off, — a tall dark figure crossing the solitary plain. He came straight towards the spot where they were resting. For some reason they were all silent. A large gray-winged sea-bird flew by overhead.

"That is not a gull, surely?" said Hardinge, following it with his eyes.

The sound of Lalli's firm footstep and the click of

his spurs were distinctly audible as he strode down the narrow sunny street. For one moment it seemed as if he would pass them.

"We are here," said Barbara, rising and looking at him across the crumbling partition wall.

It was as they were walking across the fields on their way to Castle Fusano that Lalli asked her to let him speak to her alone for a few minutes. He made the request with a constrained formality which could not fail to surprise her.

"But I will speak to you whenever you like," she said at once, looking at him rather anxiously with her grave and beautiful eyes. "Surely you remember that we are friends?"

He made no answer. They were crossing the grass-grown bridge which leads over the last arm of the Stagno. He turned his head aside and looked down at the treacherous sluggish water. A thousand discordant voices rose harshly from the confines of the Marsh. When at last his glance met hers she was struck with the extreme pallor of his face.

## CHAPTER VIII.

MRS. DAMON and Mr. Floyd had driven onward to the wood, after a very brief pause, with something of the fatalistic resignation characteristic of the American parent.

"I hope Octave will not be too tired, I'm sure. It was very foolish of her to ride, — very. She is quite certain to over-exert herself," Mrs. Damon remarked rather plaintively, putting up her hand to pat her smooth dark hair, and looking with dark and melancholy eyes at her companion. The carriage was standing before the small inn door. They had met no one on the road down here, and that road had been dusty; the sun was hot. The country had the power of irritating Mrs. Damon. She was secretly conscious of annoyance against this stupid iteration of meaningless hedgerow and field.

"I quite envy you your — your unconcern about poor dear Barbara," she said, a trifle sharply. "And so popular as she is with the gentlemen too. I'm sure Count Lalli is most devoted. It is most gratifying, of course. And perhaps I am foolish, and it is only a *mother's* anxiety —"

She stopped short and lifted her flexible eyebrows. "But dear Barbara is very attractive, of course. So

clever," she added hastily. She smiled in an embarrassed sort of way, and passed her handkerchief across her lips. "I think I will go up-stairs for a moment. I dare say these people can give me a room where I might wash my hands and get rid of a little of this dust?" she murmured almost inaudibly.

"Allow me to assist you," said Mr. Floyd slowly, turning his large pale face blankly upon her, and offering her his hand. He stood, leaning against the carriage-door, biting his nails absently; turning his quick keen glance from time to time upon the men busied about the horses, while she toiled up the narrow stair. "How could I have been so stupid?" she asked herself with a half-frightened, half-amused look. "I shall tell Octave. What! have you no better room than this, my good woman? Go and fetch me some hot water then. Mind, not tepid water; hot," she said, sinking languidly down upon the vacant chair, and looking about her with an expression of some curiosity and contempt at the small and not over-clean room. There was a highly colored counterpane on the dubious bed. An equally brilliant lithograph of Our Lady of Sorrow hung by the window, simpering placidly above the seven wounds. By a bold metaphor the artist had represented the Madonna's eyes of a vivid purple. Their gaze seemed to follow Mrs. Damon's movements about the room as she slowly adjusted herself before the glass. That dim cracked surface had apparently the power of insinuating new wrinkles. She took off her hat, and looked at herself close and anxiously until the muscles

grew strained, the lines deepened, about her mouth and eyes. She smiled at her own reflection, but her great hollow eyes never lost that look of sombre anxiety. She rested her chin upon her hand.

"So old already!" she said, with a half-inaudible sigh.

Something like a look of terror passed over the pretty, faded, foolish face.

The next moment she started and looked hastily around at the abrupt entrance of the padrona.

"Why — why don't you knock before coming into people's rooms?" she asked, with some asperity.

The Italian woman looked at her calmly, almost indifferently. She was a strongly built young peasant-woman of perhaps thirty.

"There is your hot water," she said. "We have none hotter."

She set the jug down upon the table, and folded her arms contemplatively, and stood gazing at Mrs. Damon with the deliberate scrutiny of a curious animal. Her bony hands, curved and flattened by hard labor, hung down in an irresolute way from her wrists.

"Where are the towels? I suppose you have towels," said Mrs. Damon, presently.

"Certainly. We have towels."

"Then go and get me some — instantly," the widow said petulantly. It was only habit which kept her from stamping her foot. "Oh dear," she said helplessly, "I wish Octave were here with me."

The flies buzzed noisily and incessantly against the

ceiling. She could hear Mr. Floyd's voice in the courtyard giving an order to the coachman.

"The gentleman wishes to know if you would like to wait here for the other signori?" the woman asked, coming back with a towel over her arm.

"Certainly not."

Mrs. Damon hesitated a moment. She looked about her, she put her hand in her pocket and drew out a small ivory box of rice-powder and a dainty pink silk puff. She powdered her cheeks carefully, looked at herself, put on her hat again and gave a little nod.

"I suppose you wonder what I have been doing! Ladies have to do that, you know, otherwise their faces would get quite black in the sun," she explained graciously, turning to the peasant with a half-apologetic smile.

The woman laughed stolidly, and Mrs. Damon felt her cheeks reddening suddenly under all their careful artificial bloom.

"But these people are terrible, quite brutalized, I assure you," she said to Mr. Floyd, picking her way daintily across the stones to the carriage-step. She was rested and refreshed, her spirits rose with the sensation of comfort. She talked pleasantly to her companion. The carriage-wheels rolled noiselessly over the soft grassy lane. She looked with approval on either hand at fields of yellow marshy bloom. The short forest turf stretched without a break to the very doorstep of the Chigi shooting-lodge. Single pine-trees, straight-stemmed and tall, rose from the

grass. Mild white oxen fed slowly in the sunshine, or stepped together with patient strength, dragging huge loads of wood. The crack of their driver's whip sounded long after they had disappeared from sight among the trees. And across the clearing rose the forest, a goodly army of tall pines, dark serried trunks, and deep, uplifted, murmurous crowns of shade. There were yellow daffodils in the sunlight in the moist meadow where the oxen were feeding.

"They never do attack one, I suppose?" Mrs. Damon suggested rather nervously, glancing doubtfully at the formidable curve of their horns.

Mr. Floyd turned his face slowly towards her. He pushed his hat to the back of his head and pressed his finger-tips together in an attitude of attention.

"You were speaking of Barbara a short time ago; if I am correct in my impression, I gathered from your remark the idea that this young Count Lalli —"

"Oh, but you must not expect me to reveal young ladies' secrets," said Mrs. Damon promptly, poking at the grass with her parasol and then shaking her head at him playfully. "What I know is only what a little bird has whispered to me; and it is a little bird that never speaks to gentlemen."

"Perhaps Miss Octave —"

"Now, Mr. Floyd, as if these poor dear children were not to be allowed to have their own little secrets! Why, when I was a girl —" She looked down, and fingered her dress with a conscious smile. "My little bird never reveals secrets to gentlemen."

"Well, well!" said Mr. Floyd, looking down at the

ground with a sigh. He drew out his cigar-case automatically, and then restored it quickly to his pocket. The old Southern planter never smoked before "the ladies." He did not avail himself now of Mrs. Damon's permission, putting aside her entreaties with a formal wave of his hand. As the party of the young people approached them Barbara was walking beside Count Lalli. Mr. Floyd sighed again as he looked at his daughter. She came up to him and took hold of his arm.

"Are you tired, papa? Have we kept you waiting?"

But he only turned away his head. "It is to Mrs. Damon you must all make your apologies," he said slowly.

"There are no depths of humility to which I will not descend for the sake of getting some luncheon, Mrs. Damon; I place myself unrestrictedly at your mercy," said Hardinge, laughing and throwing himself down on the grass at the widow's feet.

She smiled; turning upon him a full cordial look of liking, which seemed at once to remember and include everything about him — his family, his social standing, his personal appearance — within the same measure of approval. Mrs. Damon was always more enthusiastic in her judgments than her daughter. For one thing, she was physically much stronger; she knew nothing by experience of the feeling of intense lassitude, the silent distaste of the effort of daily life, which was common experience to Octave. The strong caressing affection between mother and daughter ex-



isted quite independently of any such mental familiarity. There was nothing in this fact to disturb their intercourse. There is perhaps one mind in a hundred in which a vivid interest in the ornaments and futilities—the ribbons and trimmings—of life cannot coexist with a depressing conviction of the insignificance of existence viewed as a whole. Octave was indisputably far stricter in the observance of religious formulæ than her mother, Mrs. Damon being at times guiltily conscious of many shortcomings in the matter of attending early service and general church discipline in Lent. It was Octave who superintended all details of housekeeping in their small and dainty *ménage*, and who from time to time was subject to cautious remonstrance, for the widow was fond of a good table. Outwardly, indeed, she submitted without a murmur to much severity of decision on the part of the young neophyte; consoling herself possibly with reflecting vaguely that such keenness for self-sacrifice was not destined to survive any lengthy experience of matrimony. Religious restrictions which extended to the ordinary and familiar days of the week were like rigid rules laid down for hours of work or the practising of music,—something only permissible in a household of women, and where the comfort of “the gentlemen” was not concerned. Nine years ago such ideas were still possible in the minds of attractive-looking women, moving gracefully and with recognized success through life, looking with an agreeable feeling of superiority and contempt upon their more unsatisfied sisters, and deducing infallible

condemnatory opinions of social agitators from the objectionable character of their dress.

It was not until after luncheon that any one proposed walking to the seashore. The afternoon light threw long slanting shadows from the wood; the gray walls of the solitary castello had lost something of their forbidding aspect; even the grotesque Saracen's heads, carved in stone long years ago, when life was more episodic in character, and the peremptory visit of seafaring marauders a distinctly possible experience, — even these time-worn defenders seemed to lose something of their grimness under the delicate, persistent warmth of the March sun. Their half-human gaze followed the party of young people to the green and mysterious entrance of the wood. A straight, wide road, paved with huge blocks of lava, has cleft the forest to the shore. For a mile the bare, undeviating causeway runs straight forward as an arrow's flight, piercing the deepest recesses of the pines, — cool, fragrant places where the bright cyclamen grows in the sand, under thickets of sturdy laurel; and there is abundance of wild blue rosemary and the white, moon-faced laurustinus flower, — all wild, strong, close-petalled, blossoming things, "born of the sea and the bright day."

It was still early; the shadows fell but softly across the causeway; the whole wood seemed penetrated with a feeling of lightness and spring warmth; there was delicate pleasure in the tempered touch of the sun. In the quiet afternoon light the tall plummy softness of the Mediterranean heath glimmered palely

among the sombre trees; the forest was full of its fragrance, mingling with the warmer scent of the pines; down far green glades they could see its branches softly waving like the beckoning hands of the white-armed dryads of the wood.

It was an afternoon for much delightful leisure. "The kind of afternoon which makes one believe in Boccaccio," Hardinge said, throwing his head back lazily to watch the slanting flight of a sea-hawk across the fringe of pines. "I should feel it an anachronism to wish for a gun; but there is a capital shot to be had, you know, at that fellow."

They had left the wood behind them, and crossed the high bare dunes. The tide was coming in silently; there was no belt of rock to vex the water into resistance. The flat shore was stretched defenceless before the glittering, creeping, restless sea. At some little distance a small, low hut made a black spot of shadow on the sands.

"I wonder what that place can be—if any one lives there?" asked Barbara idly. She looked up, and her eye happened to catch Lalli's glance.

"Were you speaking to me?" he said, looking at her rather fixedly. "You must pardon my not answering; I do not understand English."

"Oh," said Barbara, flushing; "I beg your pardon. It was very stupid of me to forget."

"Is that the only thing you have forgotten, then?" asked Lalli quickly. He turned his face as he spoke towards Octave, who was saying,—

"It really is entirely Mr. Hardinge's fault, who

pretends that he can only speak French to one person at a time."

"The French plurals are so irregular," said Hardinge calmly. "All foreign tongues should be reserved for a *tête-à-tête*, where the interests are identical."

"Nonsense! *Mais quant à moi, comte, je vous demande mille fois pardon.*"

"*Mais, mademoiselle, je vous en prie —*"

Barbara had been quite silent. She looked up now.

"I was only asking you about that house over there," she said, pointing with her hand. She hesitated for an instant, as Lexeter observed. "I think I should like to walk down there. Will you walk with me?" she said.

The three left behind were silent for a moment. Miss Damon looked at her companions. "I don't think that you are a great admirer of — of Italians, Mr. Lexeter?" she suggested demurely.

"On the contrary, I admire an infinite number of Italians. It is not my fault, surely, that they are all in their graves?" said Lexeter, smiling a little at her pretty look of mischief.

"And of course, Count Lalli being a living contemporary —"

"He is certainly a fine-looking fellow," said Lexeter quickly, glancing at the tall soldierly figure crossing the sands. He saw Barbara stand still for a moment; her companion bent forward as if to pick up something which had been dropped. "It is all

such — such confounded rubbish, this talk about Italians being romantic," he broke out suddenly. "It is a superstition which came into fashion with Garibaldi and his legions. The situation was romantic, if you like. There was a mystery about it then. If you look at a bare turnpike road at midnight, you may get at a sense of romance and mystery."

"And this is the man who never rested until he had brought me to Italy!" said Hardinge, laughing, and clasping his hands behind his head.

"Italy? My dear fellow, you don't mean to say that you believe that Italy, our Italy — what we mean by saying Italy — belongs, or has belonged, or ever will belong, to men of this calibre?" His eyes turned again in Cescio Lalli's direction. "Material Italy may, perhaps, when they have turned a few more churches into barracks, and copied the Boulevard Haussmann, and canalized the Tiber, and — and whitewashed the Coliseum. That will be 'Italy for the Italians,' with a vengeance. What we find here, — our Promised Land, whose slightest memory is a joy and a possession, whose very name is dear as desire, — what have they had to do with it? what pleasure do they get out of it? Have you ever heard an Italian speak enthusiastically of anything beautiful in nature? Can they see it, except through an effort of complacency, even when it is pointed out to them? And how often have you met a Roman in a picture-gallery?"

He frowned, and pulled his hat farther down over his eyes.

"You have been here longer than I have, Miss Damon —"

"Well, but I think, you know," said Octave, "that they are very nice, and — and attentive."

"Ah," Lexeter said, glancing at her from under the brim of his hat.

"I don't know that I quite agree with you, my boy," began Hardinge doubtfully. "I remember Mazzini —"

"Yes, there is Mazzini," said Lexeter slowly; "and there have always, in all countries, been starlike souls akin to his, as high and shining and solitary; august orbs rising in the murkiest midnight, to prophesy the new birth of a new savior among men. I was not thinking of such as these. I was speaking of the average Italian, a being as passionate as he is shallow; a creature uncultivated and sonorous, unscrupulous and prudent; a man who uses the most beautiful language in the world to express the most *banal* ideas, as he uses the most beautiful country to illustrate the most barren modern doctrines, — an overgrown, unproductive army, and the ideals of a popular parliament."

"You can't deny their common-sense —" began Hardinge.

"They are the most practical-minded of individuals, if you come to that."

"And if ever I take to ecclesiastical architecture," the young American said, glancing at Octave with a smile, "I shall build an altar to common-sense. Not that commonest form of common-sense, which is merely prevalent and classified stupidity; but an

altar to the unknown god, to the faculty one pretends to be surprised not to find in the lowest classes, and which is really the final expression, the résumé of the finest, highest civilization. The Greeks knew it," Hardinge said, raising himself slightly, resting his elbow upon the sand and turning his keen and resolute profile to the sea, — "they knew this temperate, flexible, dispassionate condition of the mind."

He might have passed for a young Greek himself at that moment. As far as temperament goes he was certainly quite Hellenic. There was an expression of vitality about Hardinge which was really extraordinary. His laugh was contagious, his enjoyment of life a positive pleasure to every one who knew him. I think he never himself was aware of the number of his friends. When he was pleased, his good-humor was irresistible as the sunshine. "Confound the fellow! I believe he thinks he is born into a perfectly fresh world every morning!" some one had said in describing him; and indeed I fancy the observation was not far wrong.

Lexeter looked at him now for a moment in silence. He shook his head; he got up slowly to his feet and thrust his hands into his pockets and walked away. His head was bent down.

"Poor Mr. Lexeter," said Octave, looking after him, "he walks as if he were tired. It must be very disagreeable to be lame in that fashion."

"Poor old boy, he is the best fellow I know — taking him all round — is Lexeter," said Hardinge, lazily enough, and still looking at her.

His eyes were dark and not large, but extraordinarily brilliant; their ordinary expression was one of an intelligent, rather satirical amusement. Some man at his college had given him the nickname of the "Social Naturalist," by way of defining and resenting the mental attitude which he commonly adopted. He had told Miss Damon of the *sobriquet*; she remembered it now, as she sat with her long dark eyelashes lowered, the delicate transparent color coming and going on her cheek. The high sand-dune above them was crested with a low sturdy growth of rosemary and laurel. Their branches were swaying stiffly; from time to time the leaf-shadows rested upon her hands and hair. The sea before them lay still and glittering.

"Barbara must have gone farther than she intended," said Octave.

There was no sign now of any one moving along the sands. Lexeter had rejoined Mr. Floyd. They had strolled back towards the wood together.

"I want you to do something for me, if you will," Mr. Floyd had said. He had a great liking for Lexeter. "I shall pay you the compliment, sir, of not apologizing to you for troubling you with an account of my private affairs," the old gentleman began, formally enough, leaning both wrinkled hands upon his old-fashioned cane, and standing with his hat pushed well back, turning his large, pale, joyless face upon Lexeter. "You know this young fellow, Lalli?" he asked.

"I have met him at your house, and seen him half a dozen times at a café."



"Well, well; you know him as young men know each other," the older man said testily.

His request was very simple. Mrs. Damon had pointed out to him the fact of Lalli's evident intentions. "These facts are plain enough to lookers-on, sir. They are made a common subject of comment. It is only those nearest concerned who are to be kept in ignorance,—tricked and blinded until all is over, that the fools may not be disappointed of their cursed idiotic laughter. Well—this has nothing to do with my daughter," Mr. Floyd said suddenly, fixing his light piercing glance upon his companion's face. "The child is only following out a woman's first instinct of concealment. It's inevitable; I don't blame her. And perhaps indeed the secret has not been such a close one. You may have observed it yourself, sir, although you have not considered it wise or necessary to give me warning?"

"I should certainly not have presumed to speak to you about Bar—about Miss Floyd," Lexeter said quietly, taking out a cigar and beginning methodically to light it. He had received an impression which many subsequent trifles only tended to confirm, that the proud old Carolinian had never known how to forget the woman he had loved, and who betrayed him. In the bitterness of his resentment he would have destroyed every association and memory of his youth. Was it his pride or his heart which had experienced the fiercest pang? In either case the fact remained that his daughter was now the only visible token left of that past, to recall the humiliation of

those days,—their impotent rage, their despair. And his daughter—

“Whatever I can ascertain about Count Lalli I will tell you. I fear it will be very little. I know nothing against him. I know almost nothing of the men with whom he associates,” Lexeter said. “If we have not more things in common I dare say it is as much my fault as his. I am an unsociable brute in a general way. I get along well enough with Walter Hardinge; but he is an exception. I will find out what I can for you, but I fear you have made a poor selection of a diplomatic agent,” he went on, looking down with a curious sort of smile. “And, candidly, I don’t think the count is ever likely to make me many confidences. We are not sympathetic to each other. Why? upon my word I have nothing to say against him! He is very good-looking. I have heard Miss Damon express great admiration for him. She says he is interesting. I don’t know. I am a much older man than he is. I have a different life; very different occupations. It is perfectly reasonable that we should find next to nothing to say to each other.” He raised his head and looked about him with eyes which noted but little of the quiet loveliness of the afternoon light among the pine stems. And yet, long after, it was curious how he remembered the details of this day. “I am very much older than Lalli,” he repeated.

“And I suppose Barbara likes his good looks, and all that sort of thing?”

Lexeter made no answer.

"It would have been more friendly of you, Lexeter — I should have taken it more kindly of you, sir — to have warned me of this before," Mr. Floyd said again. "I am not in the habit of expecting much frankness from the majority of men. 'Tis human nature to think first of one's own interest. But we have been friendly together —"

"Should you have spoken in my place? I do not think you had the slightest right to exact that from me," the young man said quite respectfully. He thrust his hands deep down into his pockets. "Lalli has some money, I believe. He has a house somewhere in the country, and there is this place of his, — this farm that we are all going out to. I believe that he is well off for an Italian."

Yes, — Mrs. Damon had intimated as much. "It will be a proof of his disinterestedness, marrying Barbara. My daughter has but very moderate expectations. Her husband must necessarily be provided with an income. 'Tis true there may be something coming to her later. There is some small property left by — by Mrs. Floyd. I shall be forced to go to America to look after it if indeed there is any prospect of this marriage. You see some of the pleasures of paternity," he said, looking up at Lexeter with his worn, unexpectant smile. "You never married, Lexeter. I would not be understood to say anything disrespectful of the ladies; they have their own way of doing things. But perhaps you are wise, sir, you are wise."

"There is such a thing as the wisdom of necessity,"

said Lexeter, rather curtly. He was conscious of that sort of speechless irritation which comes from having our deficiencies accepted as patent facts.

They said nothing more to each other. "Presumably Mrs. Damon will have finished her siesta," Mr. Floyd observed. Lexeter watched him moving away through the wood, — a short, heavy, middle-aged figure. His gray head was bent down a little; all that joyous tenderness of summer light and shadow only served, by contrast, to make the unelastic step seem heavier, the unexpectant face more dull.

Lexeter stood looking after him with a curious mingling of liking and compassion. He felt as a man feels towards his old friend and companion on the eve of a final separation; he was moved by an impulse of extreme indulgence and toleration. "And so poor little Barbara marries her handsome soldier lover, and — and that is the end of the old story," he thought. He looked up at the full budding exuberance of fresh life about him. Spring had come; it was time to break up the winter encampment. The new season had prevailed over the old, he told himself with an indescribable pang of regret, — of fruitless longing. His next action was not insignificant of that complex mood, half cynicism, half sentiment, which characterized the man. He took a note-book out from his pocket, and jotted down a list of figures on the page. They were old calculations; he viewed them now with the accustomed bitterness of an old enemy. "I wonder what Mr. Floyd would say to such an income as that? There is no fool like an old fool, but I defy

Folly herself to sail far out of her course with such an anchor dragging," he said, shutting up his notebook, and restoring it to his pocket absently. He began thinking of Barbara. He began asking himself how it was possible that she should care for that fellow? "Damn him! he is like a moral advertisement, — all his attractions thrust upon the public."

But this did not make him doubt the probability of Barbara's fascination. At Lexeter's age a man is not apt to consider moral incongruity as the kind of barrier to an eligible marriage, which will be patent to other eyes than his own. The fellow can afford to marry her, he thought, — and if she has got to care for him already, — poor little Barbara!

Perhaps there was something contagious in Mr. Floyd's hopeless fatalism. It seemed to him impossible now that this marriage should be prevented.

There were flowers growing in the short grass at his feet. He stooped down and plucked one of them, — a white narcissus, such as he had given Barbara a few hours earlier. He held it in his hand irresolutely, looking up the road. It seemed to him quite possible that he should see her coming down there towards him between the trees. All that green and golden wealth of tremulous light and shade seemed only a fitting background for the gracious young figure. She should come to him with the sunlight falling on her white hands, and a smile in those clear, trustful eyes. And then — then — the flower dropped from between his fingers. It fell on the bare stones of the pathway. He looked down at it — "Absit omen!"

He attempted to smile, but it was at best a dubious sort of contraction which passed over his face. He shook his head impatiently; presently he, too, thrust his hands back into his pockets and walked away. He was walking towards the sea.

## CHAPTER IX.

THEY had gone some little distance from the others before Lalli spoke to her.

"Possibly — probably, you are wondering why I asked you to come?"

"Not at all. It was careless of us all to have been speaking English. I do not know how it happened. I am sorry," Barbara answered absently. She had been walking along with her face to the sea, she turned it now towards him. "I think it was *I* who asked you," she began, smiling.

Whatever it was she saw in her companion's face it had the effect of silencing her.

The fisherman's hut rose close before them, an empty shed, thatched with the dead reeds of the Stagno. Some storm had blown the rude door from its hinges; it lay broken and rotting in the shadow on the sand.

"After all there was nothing to see here," she said, looking down.

Her own voice sounded uncertain, strange; but she was conscious of nothing distinctly. The wide plain of sea, the unfamiliar open look of things about them, gave to this moment something of the vivid, arbitrary quality of a dream. The very feeling of the hot loose sand under foot seemed to remove them

to an infinite distance from the Roman streets. A gull flew by overhead, the shadow of its wings making a dark moving spot across the sand ; the light restless wind blew more freshly in their faces.

"I am tired ; and there is nothing to see. Shall — shall we go back ?" said Barbara, standing still and raising her eyes with a palpable effort to his face.

Lalli turned his head with a slight start, as if some oppressive spell had broken.

"No. Why should we go back ?" he asked slowly, gazing fixedly at her. The sea-bird flitted past again, its shrill cry sounded faintly from a distance.

"Oh, as you please," said Barbara, looking down again with an effort.

She moved her hand, and the glove she was holding fell upon the sand at her feet. He stooped to pick it up for her ; it was at that moment Lexeter was watching them.

"Why should I tell you what you know already ? But it is impossible you should know how much I love you," he said.

Her hands closed suddenly upon each other. It was the first time in her life that any man had spoken to her such words. She bent her head ; involuntarily she moved on a few steps towards the shelter of the ruined hut. Across the intense personal consciousness of that moment there flashed the conviction that this was a crisis, her life could never be quite the same again ; it had been touched from the outside.

She moved on mechanically to the shadow and sat down on the broken planks. A high sand-dune rose



behind the gray weather-beaten building; in this sheltered corner the coarse sea-grass had spread an inextricable knotted network down the hillside. There was a dark semicircular line of sea-weed, the dead drift of some forgotten storm, on the sand at her feet. She sat looking at this. Lalli was standing in front of her. He was saying, —

“I think I must have loved you from the first moment I ever saw you. Do you remember that night you went to the ball? You came down the stairs all in white, and Margherita was holding up a light behind you.”

“Ah!” said Barbara, bending her head lower. She remembered confusedly what he had told her that first evening; of how he had watched her for months in the different churches; but perhaps he had forgotten? A ray of sunlight passing through the cracks in the weather-beaten boards fell upon her hair as she moved, and on the warm delicate whiteness of her chin and throat.

“I have always loved you,” said Lalli, looking down at her. “I have no right to say so. I have nothing to offer you —”

She lifted her hand slightly. “I wish you would not —”

“I have nothing. And you — you are rich —” Barbara looked up quickly. “You have friends. You are beautiful. You — you have all your life before you,” Lalli said, turning his face abruptly to the sea, his voice going up into a thin, high falsetto with excitement. “I am a doomed man. Who shall

struggle against fatality? I am fated; I told you so that first night. Whatever I touch goes wrong. Whatever I attempt fails. Whatever I wish for — " He stopped short, grinding his heel into the sand. " 'Tis fatality," he said again, looking down at Barbara with a white face and wild gleaming eyes. " I am a man pursued by destiny (*Sono un uomo perseguitato dal destino*). I submit."

Barbara lifted her face quickly; he was not looking at her.

"Do you suppose I have not seen things and understood things?" he broke out incoherently. "I know that your father hates me. I know that he only tolerates my presence in the house. And as for that Mr. Lexeter, do you suppose I cannot see through his pretext of not speaking French? Not speaking French! — the coward! he did not dare say so before me."

"Mr. Lexeter is not a coward," said Barbara, flushing suddenly.

"A liar then!"

"And it was not Mr. Lexeter at all; it was Mr. Hardinge who said that, as a joke," she went on gravely, not noticing the interruption, but with a sudden pang of distaste and disappointment. Why would he persist in using such words? in showing himself in such a light?

"And you say this to me?" Lalli demanded shrilly. "You defend those men to me? They had better be careful. I — I am not used to so much patience." He took a sudden step forward, and his voice dropped.

"I have borne with so much in these last weeks only to see you — only to be near you," he said imploringly. He bent down and touched her clasped hands with the utmost gentleness. "I do love you so, Barbara — dearest!" he said.

She started at the word; he could see her lip tremble.

"I would go through it all again, every moment of it, for the chance of feeling your hand in mine — my dearest!" he said hotly, watching her face with eager, supplicating looks. "Did I ever do you any harm, Barbara? You — you are like ice to me — like stone. I put all my life in your hands, at your feet, and you — Sometimes I think you have no more feeling in you than — that!" he said, striking his hand against the rough splintered wood. His voice dropped again. "You — you are making me suffer horribly."

"But, Count Lalli — Oh! I am so sorry!" she said helplessly, hiding her face in her hands.

He hardly noticed her distress. "Two years ago I had a magnificent career before me. That is over. Since then I have been living the life of a dog. I don't know why I have n't shot myself through the head; twenty times over I have been on the point of doing it. I am sick of life. *Son stuffo di questa vita*. And because once I have trusted to somebody; because for once I have believed that a woman — It is quite as well that you never cared for me," he said sullenly, crossing his arms over his chest and hanging his head. "I bring misfortune with me. And how should you have cared? You have youth,

you have beauty, you have friends — what have I to give you? To be unfortunate is to be deserted, as this world goes. I bring misfortune. 'T is fatality."

He turned his head away sharply.

"I suppose — I don't know why I should want to hear you say it" — with a short nervous laugh — "but — you don't care for me at all? I have given you my life. But you don't love me, Barbara?"

The wind stirred uneasily in the blackened weeds. "You don't love me?" he demanded again, staring down at her with wild, incredulous eyes.

"I — cannot," said Barbara, lifting up her face. Her sweet voice had grown husky. His words had conjured up a vision of herself standing aloof, refusing help when assistance was wanted. Her own reluctance to answer him seemed the basest form of selfishness, and yet — She looked at him, helplessly, like a child. Her cheek was still red from the pressure of her fingers. "I thought — that when you said we might be friends —" she began. She hesitated. She put her hand up to her lips in an uncertain way, and was silent.

"Don't cry," the young man said hastily, still looking at her. It was almost the first word he had spoken which sounded as if he were aware of anything outside of his own smarting vanity, his stinging disappointment. His own eyes filled with tears as he spoke. He never thought of hiding it. "I would not grieve you," he said more gently. He waited for her to speak, perhaps; but she was silent. "You talk of friendship," he went on presently, with grow-

ing vehemence, "of friendship between you and me! You affect to believe that it was possible! Friendship! Why I have loved you since the first moment I knew you. And you —"

"I thought it *was* possible," said Barbara, turning pale.

He never for an instant believed her. I do not imagine it even occurred to him that she was speaking truth. "I had a sister once, who died," he said slowly, finding that she remained silent. "She died in my arms. I was only nineteen, and she was my friend — my confidante. It nearly broke my heart." He put out his right hand. "Take her place, Barbara," he said. "You do not love me — 't is fatality. Be my sister then; let me feel that you could come to me as to a brother. Trust me — depend on me." He held out his hand, it was torn and bleeding where he had struck it against the rough splinters of the wall. "I don't ask you for anything; I devote myself to you. Only give me your hand, to show that you trust me," he said. The delicate white fingers were trembling as he took them into his. "You are not afraid of me? You are as safe with me — you would be as safe with me anywhere — in the midst of a desert — as if — as if you were the blessed Madonna!" he said, sighing, and looking at her with wild, reproachful eyes.

There was something in his tone and in the sight of his bleeding hand which touched and moved her quite unaccountably.

"Please take my handkerchief. Here, I will tie it

up for you," she said hurriedly. Her face flushed a little, as she held it bent down, her fingers busy in binding up the scratch. "I *would* trust you; but you said you did not want my friendship," she said in a low voice, and smiling, although she felt her eyes filling as she spoke.

"*Non è vero!* I never said it!" he answered hastily.

He bent down and kissed the fingers which were fastening the knot of the bandage. He held her hand in his; she did not draw it away; she was anxiously willing to prove to him her passionate sense of gratitude for his devotion. She raised her eyes rather timidly and looked at him. He was watching her with his head thrown back, with an indescribable look of melancholy and tenderness softening the lines of his handsome, arrogant face. With his wounded hand he looked indeed like some devoted cavalier. She stood looking up at him; her eyes were dark and wet, and two tears were glittering on her cheek. She put up her left hand — he was still holding the other — and brushed them away and smiled. The wind blew restlessly in their faces. The tide was coming in with a slow, soft sound of lapsing waves. It was a very happy moment for them both.

They walked back along the beach still hand-in-hand, their lengthening shadows moving on before them, across the wave-indented sands. It was long years before Barbara appreciated the full significance of that interview, — its influence in shaping all her future life; and yet they had been away so short a time that the sail which Hardinge had spoken of was

still in sight, a mere white cloud against the sunny sky. She watched it lessening, fading away in the horizon, following its unknown course with who can tell what vague, swift dreams? But she started, and a look of trouble came over her face again as Lalli asked abruptly, —

“Who gave you those flowers?”

He was looking at the bunch of white narcissi which Lexeter had gathered for her, and which still hung, crushed and drooping, where she had fastened them in her dress.

“Throw the things away, I beg of you. I will not have you wearing that man’s flowers,” he said vehemently, speaking with the most curious mingling of irritation and entreaty in his voice. He seemed to attach an importance to the request that was quite incomprehensible, returning to it again and again, protesting, when she refused, — and at first she refused almost indignantly, — that he meant to imply no disrespect to the giver. “Only do it for me. It is a little thing; what can it cost you to do it? Only do it for me. Throw them away, to satisfy me, Barbara. By heaven, you would not have to ask me for a thing twice!” Count Lalli said passionately.

“Hush! There is Mr. Lexeter himself coming to meet us. Oh, please, hush,” said Barbara, looking anxiously towards the wood. Intentionally or not, the flowers fell from her dress as she moved rapidly forward. She put out her hand. “Are you ready? Have we kept you waiting? I—I hope we have not kept you waiting, Mr. Lexeter?” she asked rather

incoherently. It was with a feeling of relief that she greeted his friendly, melancholy face.

Had he heard anything of what they had been saying?

"The others have gone on through the wood," he said, looking at her in his quiet, kindly way; and it was then, and with a certain pang of regret, that she noticed his gift of blossoms lying bruised and broken upon the path. "Miss Damon proposed that they should stroll back slowly and wait for us near the carriage." He glanced at Lalli. "I hope Monsieur le Comte was satisfied with his inspection of the house?"

"I — oh, we did not go into it," cried Barbara hastily, looking from one to the other of the two men.

They walked back through the pine-wood almost in silence. The shadows reached now far across the causeway. It was only the pine-tops which still glowed, a mass of deep-bronzed green, in the warm evening light. Barbara walked on rather quickly. She carefully avoided looking at Lalli; indeed, he seldom addressed her, and when he did so it was with a marked formality of manner which made the girl's heart beat painfully. She felt more than usually grateful to Lexeter for the suggestion when he proposed her taking the empty place in the carriage.

"You are tired, and it will be no trouble for me to lead your horse home now," he said.

"You are very good to me," the girl answered thankfully. Lalli was walking in a line with them, but on the farther side of the road.



The night was warm and still. Even Mrs. Damon made no objection when the coachman proposed to leave the carriage open. At first, on leaving Ostia, she had begun talking in a languid way to Barbara, but before long the easy steady motion, the dim light, and the unusual fatigue of many hours spent in the open air, proved too strong for her. She opened her eyes wide, asked a question about Octave, and without waiting for an answer, she wrapped her fur-lined cloak more closely about her, and closed her eyes and slept.

The light faded slowly away from the west; the hedgerows became blurred and shapeless; here and there a pool of water glimmered softly in the low-lying meadows, reflecting the starlit, shadowless sky. There was no sound audible but the muffled tramp of the horses.

From time to time Lexeter rode up to the side of the carriage; he rode beside it with his hand resting upon the open door. Barbara hardly spoke to him; she turned her eyes slowly from her father's face to his with an indescribable feeling of safety and protection. She too rested her head against the cushions, but it was not to sleep. A charm as softly penetrating as the spell of this calm spring night was upon her. Lalli's words, "I ask you for nothing; I devote myself to you," were like some influence in the air about her, and life was noble and very sweet. She made no more resistance. She felt herself surrounded by love; she felt inexpressibly safe.

## CHAPTER X.

MR. FLOYD found a telegram waiting for him when he returned that night. It was a summons to meet an old friend at Perugia, he told his daughter briefly. There was to be a private sale of some valuable manuscripts and books; it was probable that he should be away from home for several days. He left Rome by an early morning train. "Don't get up for me; I can have my breakfast at the café at the station. Don't get up. It is nonsense your getting up at that hour," he said to Barbara.

Afterwards she was always glad to remember how fully she had intended to disobey him.

"I am too tired to tell you all about it to-night," she said. She stood in the doorway with a candle in her hand, looking at him as he sat with his back to her, writing a note. The light was shining upon his gray head, — she noticed how gray his head had turned of late. There was an old seal-ring upon his finger, which she idly remembered having played with when she was a child; she had seen it every day since then, and never remembered it before. She went slowly towards him, and put her hand upon her father's shoulder.

"Are you waiting for anything? Good-night, good-night again," he said, without looking up.

After all, what difference could it make? She could speak to him about Cesco Lalli in the morning. What difference could it possibly make?

She went to her own room. The window was open. She set down her light upon a table, and walked over to the casement and looked out. It was her favorite place and attitude; she was familiar with every dark silhouette of roof-top and convent belfry against the sky. It was early yet, but Rome at night is of all cities the most silent. She looked down upon darkened houses and scattered lights. The wind blew fresh and softly in her face, stirring the loose hair upon her forehead. She laid her head down upon her clasped hands, looking up at the clear quiet sky. She was not consciously thinking of Count Lalli. She remembered what Mr. Hardinge had said to her on their ride out. And then the cadenced sound of the horses' feet, as Lexeter rode home beside the carriage; and how kind he was to her. Poor Mr. Lexeter! Poor fellow! She could not have told you herself why she pitied him, except that at that moment there seemed no limit to the good-will and tenderness she felt towards all her little world. Looking up at those stars, life seemed so full of fine possibilities. Life! She was still child enough to look forward, half hopefully, half humbly, to life as to some great fact, an opportunity which was approaching. And she meant to do so much —

And then she went back again to that half-hour by

the fisherman's hut on the sands. She felt the strong, warm pressure of Cesco's hand on hers. How noble he was! How chivalric! "I want nothing. I ask you for nothing. I devote myself to you," he said.

Very nearly at the same time Lalli was sitting at a corner-table — his usual place — at the café behind the old post-office, opposite the House of Parliament, on Monte Citorio. He was not alone — Marcantonio Borgia was with him. The worthy cavaliere looked troubled! "*Che diavolo!* one does not know what to say exactly," he began again with hesitation.

"Say! Don't be a fool!" said Cesco sharply, raising his savage, moody eyes from the floor.

He put both elbows upon the greasy marble table, between the empty coffee-cups and cigar-ash, leaning half-way across it in his eagerness, and pouring out a wild, incoherent mixture of love and wounded pride and jealousy.

Not marry that girl after what had passed between them — after his having committed himself? "Her father hates me," he said, bringing his hand down heavily upon the table and staring hard at Borgia's stolid and massive face, — "her father hates me!" He was quite mistaken in making this statement. Mr. Floyd's feelings towards the young Italian had never before to-day been even definite enough to be classed as dislike. But Lalli would not have believed this to be possible; we may speak of — we so seldom realize — the indifference with which we are regarded. "Her old father hates me; and as for that d——d Englishman — that Lexeter —"

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"Lesseterre! Is that the young one? — the one who smiles? — with the blue eyes?"

"Don't be a fool!" said Cesco again, impatiently.

He sat biting his nails and staring out at the dull, empty piazza. A few drops of rain began to fall, making the worn old stones glisten in the gaslight. Some men were quarrelling in the opposite corner over their coffee and dominoes. An officer, an old acquaintance of his, passed by him and nodded. "Have you seen the evening paper? Here, waiter, a glass of brandy. There is nothing new. I see that little Raimondi is dead. You remember him? — A little fellow, went as mad as a March hare. He used to be in your old regiment, poor devil! Hallo! what's the matter with you, Borgia? What are you making such eyes at me for? If you are talking secrets, why can't you say so, and be done with it? Go on then. I've lived too long with my wife not to learn the virtue of deafness," the new-comer said good-naturedly. He got up and carried his glass to another table, opening the paper with an ostentatious parade of interest.

"I love that girl, you know. Confound it all! I *do* love her," Lalli said suddenly, lifting up his head. All the sullenness, the air of commonness which ill-temper developed in his face, had passed out of it. He looked very noble and handsome as he spoke. "I shall marry her, you know," he said, still watching Borgia with bright, confident eyes. "I shall marry Barbara."

He sat up straighter, and laughed as he spoke, — a

joyous, boyish laugh, which made the *dame du comptoir* look up with languid curiosity from the account-book she was verifying. "You seem happy to-night, signor conte. Can it be — But there, *via!* one should not ask for reasons from a young man," she said, as the two friends lingered a moment beside her counter, waiting for change. Lalli answered her with some idle compliment. I do not know what it was. Something probably which no more seemed incongruous to him than the fact of his discussing Barbara at such a time and place.

The woman laughed. "*Diamine!* but one sees that you are mad, both of you. A nice pair, upon my word! No, no, signor conte. One has heard all that before. Until he has sold them, the oranges never grow stale in the *fruttajolo's* basket. *Che vuole?* One has heard all that before!"

She looked after them with a quick Italian smile — a flashing of eyes and lips — as they passed out into the wet and silent street.

"Cesco," said Borgia, taking his arm, "don't cut up rough now, there's a good fellow — but — but — oh, hang it all, I say! How long is it since you have been to Bracciano?"

Lalli stopped whistling and looked at him.

"I — have n't been to Bracciano," he said.

"Ah! Ah yes; I see."

"Precisely so. The observation does you infinite credit. But would you mind explaining what it is you see? Not that I'm particularly curious. I ask for the sake of information chiefly."

"All right!" said Borgia sulkily, shrugging his heavy shoulders. "As you please. Only it strikes me as being rather late in the day —"

"It is a quarter to twelve precisely," said Cesco, politely taking out his watch.

"— for foolery of that kind. As if, first and last, I did not know very nearly as much as yourself about la bella Regina. Ah, talk about a beautiful face, if you like —"

"The beautiful face had better not be talked about too much just now, my good fellow," said Cesco deliberately. They had come to the door of his house. He took a latch-key from his pocket, and led the way up the dark narrow stair. He struck a match as he entered, leaving the door wide open behind him. He lighted the lamp on a small side-table, and sat down on the sofa and looked up at Borgia standing in front of him.

"You apparently do not know — you seldom do know anything before I tell you of it, my poor friend — that the dear cousin is on the verge of taking unto herself a husband? It's a fact, I assure you. It is a very good match, says my aunt, — I had a letter from my amiable aunt only this morning. She was always so fond of her nephew! He, Regina's husband I mean, is the new *deputato*, Cardella. He is from Pistoja; he is forty; he goes to mass every Sunday; and now he is to marry my cousin Gina, almost immediately."

"The devil he is!" said Marcantonio Borgia.

Lalli only laughed.

He continued to sit there for more than an hour, his hat on his head, and his feet thrust straight out before him. The lamp, flickering in the draught, threw curiously varying shadows of himself now upon the ceiling and now against the wall. "Yes; I am in love again," he thought, and an imperceptible smile of satisfaction passed rapidly over his face. He looked interested, — puzzled and yet triumphant. Any looker-on might easily have been justified in concluding that here at least was a man to whom good fortune had shown itself in unexpected places. The most experienced actor, after a lifetime spent, say, in merging his own personality in that of the young Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, might yet be pardoned some slight shock of surprise at finding his royal commands of actual force and meaning. And Lalli was by no means unprovided with a defensive armor of that cheap scepticism, which we are apt to dignify by the name of experience. But now, for the moment, he was only conscious of being uplifted and borne along by a strong current of outside influence. He made no struggle against it; on the contrary, he resigned himself luxuriously to this new emotion, which promised to differ in quality, if not in kind, with much that he had known before.

When at last he roused himself from his abstraction, he still moved across the room languidly and with a preoccupied air. But presently he lit a cigar, and unlocked his desk, and took out from it a folded paper. It was a letter which he had received from his cousin that morning, a letter written on highly



glazed and perfumed paper, in small and feeble characters, as if with the point of a pin, and enclosed in an envelope further ornamented by a colored wreath of flowers. He read it through twice carefully, and then for a moment it seemed as if he were about to answer it, for he half reached across the table and drew a blotting-book nearer to him. But it only ended in his throwing himself back in his chair with an impatient gesture. Poor Gina! it was, perhaps, the first time that she had ever succeeded in making him thoroughly uncomfortable, and it was not probable that he would forget it, although, just now, any outside appeal sounded vague and irrelevant,—like the precise wording of a late king's épitaph amidst the coronation festivities of his successor. A woman never will understand when a thing is ended! he reminded himself half wearily. But any such consideration seemed of very slight importance as compared to the question of what attitude Mr. Floyd was likely to assume?—above all, of what Barbara was likely to have said to her father? He recognized instinctively that with Barbara's character it was idle to count upon her having judiciously suppressed all reference to the change in their relative position, or even upon her having presented the facts to Mr. Floyd with any reference to his presumable wishes. The idea that by remaining silent she might possibly be escaping blame, would be, he knew, the very incentive needed to urge her into fuller confidence. The fact seemed unaccountable from any known theory of motives, but he accepted the inconvenient frankness as regarded

her; it seemed a part of herself, like her delight in all out-of-door pleasures, or that wide-eyed seriousness of glance which separated her in his imagination from other women.

But in fact Barbara had never spoken. She had awakened late from a heavy sleep to find the rain beating against the window, and hear Margherita's account of how the signor padrone had started off in all that storm — and as for stopping to think twice about his rheumatism, not he. It was as if new life had come into the house since the day the young signor conte, bless his handsome face! had come to fetch the signor and the signorina to Bracciano. Not that she, Margherita, was one to hold that any young man was good enough to have the run of the house — like the Signora Damon, who — she knew it from the signora's own cook, Rosalia — would go out of the room, while young *forestieri* were calling, and never think twice about leaving Miss Octave to talk to them by herself. No, the saints be praised! that was not her way of looking at it. Although, *se sa!* youth will be youth, and as for shutting one's self up in a convent, if the Lord wanted the good-looking women to give up the world and pleasing themselves then what were the ugly ones made for, she would just like to know?

It was a long, empty day. In the morning she had intended to go to Octave, and instead of that she had taken up some needlework and seated herself by an open window, listening to the soft, slow falling of the rain. The hours, too, seemed to pass softly. Before

she could realize it the whole day was gone. It was growing dusk. She let her work slip from her knee to the ground, and rose and began pacing up and down the long room in the twilight. As she passed each window she could see the heavy clouds moving slowly in the wind. A bell rang sharply and suddenly from the convent across the way. Margherita was bringing in a lamp, she stopped and crossed herself; it was the Ave Maria.

"And there is a book for you, signorina, brought by the signor conte's own man," the old woman said abruptly, putting a package down before her on the table.

It was a popular history of Greece, a large square volume with little old-fashioned woodcuts, representing such things as Alcibiades and his dog, or Socrates drinking the hemlock. Many of the passages were marked with feeble pencillings, and on the flyleaf was recorded, in a boy's handwriting, that this book was presented to Maria Lalli on her fourteenth birthday, as a mark of affection, by her devoted brother Cesco. And then followed a date of some ten years back. Immediately under this were added the words "To my other sister," and the word "Ostia" several times underscored. She sat up until nearly midnight turning the pages over. They were the old stories which she had learned as a child, and there was something in the simplicity and homeliness of the gift, which was like a link between her own and this other childhood. A whole world of association was growing up around her as she sat there alone in that silent room,

turning over the yellow leaves of this shabby old school-book, and listening half unconsciously to the soft, ceaseless dropping of the rain.

When Lexeter came in to call one afternoon two or three days later, this book was the first thing he noticed lying on the table beside Barbara's work. He picked it up and glanced at it inquiringly, but laid it down again almost immediately, and without making any comment.

"That is — Count Lalli sent me that to read," she said presently, seeing that he was not going to speak.

"So I imagined," said Lexeter indifferently.

He stayed there for perhaps half an hour, saying very little. The afternoon light fell full upon Barbara's bent head as she sat in her accustomed seat in the window. He watched for a little the calm regular movement of her white hands busied about her embroidery, and then his glance wandered idly about the large familiar room. The noise of the city was scarcely perceptible in that old-fashioned quarter, where every detail seemed invested with the charm of peaceful continuity, from the sunlight falling on the old parlor walls to the sparrows twittering in their nests, and the soft cooing of Barbara's doves on the convent roof across the way.

When he rose to take leave he stood still for a moment looking around him, like a man who is bidding some familiar spot farewell.

"I shall see you again? — soon?" said Barbara, giving him her hand, and smiling at him affectionately. She was so accustomed by this time to his

varying moods that she hardly observed that he did not answer her. But, I think, if she had seen the look in his eye as he went out of the door she would have called him back, and then, who knows? Between these two simple and loyal-minded people there might have been some explanation. But, evidently this thing was not to be.

## CHAPTER XI.

SHE saw Count Lalli twice in the week which followed. The first time was at the opera. She was there with Mrs. Damon and Octave. There were several other people in the box, — Mr. Clifford Dix among others. He came in late; he had been dining at the Costanzi Hotel with a party of Americans, and among other things he had told them that he looked upon Boston, Massachusetts, as upon the literary junk-shop of England. When he came in he took a place behind Barbara's chair and began talking to her. He was in exceedingly good spirits.

"I went to see 'Suicidio' last night, the new play. You should get Mrs. Damon to take you, Miss Floyd. It is wonderfully clever. By the way, I saw you there, Hardinge."

"I only stayed through the second act. I had another engagement. But suicide is not an argument," said Hardinge, "at the best it is only a retort."

"An unanswerable one, you must admit," said Mr. Dix, taking up Barbara's opera-glass, and slowly adjusting the lenses.

"Ah," observed Lexeter, "it is a curious thing, but all modern Italian literature seems written for men under five-and-twenty. It is the creed of a sous-

lieutenant. It is not the youth I object to; but one is always so conscious of the regimental restrictions. No, it is not the youth; for, in a way, youth alone is original. After all, youth is the gift of the gods; experience is only the lesson of life."

"I have met in my time some dull scholars," Clifford Dix remarked carelessly. "By Jove! I thought I knew that fellow. The back of his head has been puzzling me for the last five minutes. I am looking at your favorite Italian warrior, Miss Damon. The ex-papal Zouave. Lalli? — Lalli? — what is his name?"

"Oh, he is Barbara's warrior, not mine," said Octave quickly, taking her fan from Hardinge and shutting it up with a pretended severity.

But in the next entr'acte she took some trouble to attract Lalli's attention as he stood up in his stall surveying the house. "He will be here presently," she said, putting her little gloved hand on the back of Barbara's chair. "I am quite sure he has recognized us, although it is odd that I cannot make him look up."

But on the whole it was a relief to Barbara that he did not seek to approach them. She would unquestionably prefer not to meet him again for some time to come. Perhaps she was afraid that he might do or say something which should jar upon her idea of him. It is very possible. The pleasure she derived from thinking of him was a very real one; she was fascinated and interested; but she was not sure. There was something uncertain. It was — if Lalli

had but known it — the propitious moment for him to press his claim. While the others were talking she sat looking at the stage. The music seemed to her nearer than their voices. The actors came and went, and she sat there watching them with grave, beautiful eyes, leaning forward a little, her hands folded upon her knee. No one else had accorded more than the most casual notice to Lalli's presence there that night. But she was aware of the difference. She began to be intensely aware of slowly dividing wishes, and interests foreign to all the people around her. Their idle, happy talk grew more and more a thing outside, something apart from her own experience. She felt excluded, but the feeling did not pain her as it might have done. She felt rather like some one waiting to be called upon for great and devoted service. She had so much to give, that giving seemed the natural explanation of her being, — *la raison d'être*.

When the music stopped and the curtain fell, for an instant she did not change her attitude. She sat still, looking earnestly at the silent stage. The others had risen. There was a perceptible pause while Miss Dix looked at her, with her opera-cloak in her hand.

"It is devotion to high art," Octave affirmed, with her little treble laugh. She leaned over an empty chair and touched Barbara upon the shoulder. "My dear Barbara, you are accomplishing wonders. You are convincing Mr. Dix that an American girl can understand Rossini's music. He will have to write another story; he will have to put you in a book,"



she said. She was smiling still as she took Hardinge's arm to go down the stair.

"No, I am not laughing at Barbara," she affirmed, in answer to his question; "at least, not exactly. Yes, I am amused. Men are so stupid."

"And young ladies are so candid. No, please don't apologize; don't modify what you have said. You have been the cause," said Hardinge, looking at her with playful solemnity, — "the cause of my making an entirely new and unsuspected estimate of your sex."

She gazed at him fixedly for a moment, and then the smile faded off her face. She hesitated for an instant. "Why do the wrong things happen? Why don't the clever people care for each other?" she demanded.

"My dear Miss Damon, what a question! Am I not, then, devoted to Mr. Dix?"

"I think," said Octave petulantly, — "I think that if I were a man I should know *when* to be serious."

"Ah," he rejoined, with an instant change of tone, "you have never tried me. I am serious. I can be serious." He looked down at the long dark lashes resting on her cheek. "I can be anything you please."

There was a crowd about the door, and the carriages drove up slowly.

"Here, let me take you out of the draught; let me put you in that chair in the corner," the young man said, looking about him promptly. He put her in the only available seat. "I should like to know what you were thinking of; I am interested. I am pro-

foundly serious. I think that you owe me an opportunity for demonstrating how serious I am."

"You are clever enough to do it, but — no, it is impossible to ask you; it is too absurd. Let us go; I am sure the carriage is waiting. I shall not speak of it again, but — ah, no! I am sure the carriage is waiting."

"The carriage will not be there for another five minutes; there are twenty people waiting to drive off first. Why won't you tell me?" Hardinge said, bending over her and picking up her fan. "You know," he said, — "you know very well that I am entirely at your service."

"Ah," said Octave, looking away, with a little soft catching of her breath. He represented so many things to her at that moment. The Damons were poor; they had an income which sufficed mother and daughter to live on abroad, but the late Mr. Damon had only partially illustrated the traditions and institutions of his country. Octave remembered him dimly as the kindest of men, always overworked, and always good-natured, — especially good-natured. But after losing one fortune, much to his own surprise he had died without making another. It was living abroad within very exact limits.

Octave leaned back a little farther in her chair. She looked down at the bracelet on her wrist. Her delicate little chin just rested on the swansdown border of her cloak. There was always a dainty precision, a deft and delicate definiteness about her movements and her personality generally. If the

charm was not bewildering, it was none the less real. It was quite possible to analyze it, but, when all was said and done, there it remained, unaltered. Lexeter had observed once that little Miss Damon reminded him at times of some old minuet music of Le Clair's, — something gentle and joyous; a little chilly; a little thin in quality, perhaps, but always suggestive of willing restriction, — the ordered, curious charm of restriction and rule. As she sat there in her soft white fur, in the midst of that noise and confusion, she looked like some exquisitely finished flower. It was impossible to avoid smiling at her prettiness, with something of the same feeling of wonder and pure pleasure that one would feel on looking at apple-blossoms. And she all the while was so perfectly conscious of what young Hardinge represented! It needed only a wish on the part of this clear-eyed and decided young man to fulfil every desire of which she was capable. And she felt herself capable of so much. She was quite capable, for instance, of never caring for any other man to the same degree. Yet there was not an appreciable pause before she answered, —

“I am vexed about Barbara. You would never guess it; I told you that men are stupid. But I am very vexed about Barbara, indeed. I am so fond of Barbara, Mr. Hardinge. I am —” She looked across the hall to where Lalli was standing under a gas-lamp. “I admire her very much,” she said softly.

“Miss Floyd has a fine nature. I admire her exceedingly,” said Hardinge.

"Yes." Count Lalli was speaking to some one now. She could see his head and shoulders towering above the crowd. He was looking furiously angry. When he was sullen he looked common, but to be angry suited the character of his face. He carried himself well, with a certain air of arrogance. She was watching him all the time she spoke. "I admire her very much, but sometimes I am a little afraid of her; now, for instance, I do not like to ask her what she is going to do about—that man!" Hardinge's eyes followed the direction of hers. "If I were to ask her she would tell me at once, I know that very well. But I am afraid to ask her."

"My dear Miss Damon, you surely do not propose that I should ask her such a question myself!"

"I do not suppose that you could," said Octave gravely. "Mr. Lexeter might, possibly; Barbara has a great confidence in Mr. Lexeter."

"You evidently do not feel any particular confidence in me!" said Hardinge, beginning to laugh again.

"No," said Octave, looking at him.

He hesitated a moment before answering. "I assure you I am very much to be depended upon. I have an unlimited confidence in myself."

"You can easily find an opportunity of illustrating that!" She rose from her seat. "The five minutes are over. I know that the carriage is waiting." She took his arm and stood still for a moment. "I tell you I don't want this sort of thing to go on. I don't want Count Lalli to marry her. Oh yes; I know."

She will do as she pleases about that. But that is just where you do not understand Barbara; she will do as somebody else pleases. She has no will. She is like a man; she thinks herself the stronger of the two and she is always giving up!"

"Do you call that a fault? I shall remember it the next time you ask me to— No; but, Miss Damon, I *am* serious. Seriously!"

They were moving on now with the crowd.

"I wish so much that you would do something to help me to prevent it," said Octave rapidly, lowering her voice and glancing back over her shoulder. "No, I don't think Count Lalli stupid. Why should I? He is very nice; I like him. We saw a great deal of him when we were in Rome three years ago, mamma and I. I was only sixteen then, and he was very attentive to me. He was the first gentleman who was ever very attentive to me. Like it? Yes, of course I liked it; why not? He used to bring me flowers, until mamma objected. Mamma thought I was too young for gentlemen's society."

"Ah, Mrs. Damon is so very judicious!" Hardinge exclaimed softly.

"Do you think so? I know I was awfully vexed at the time. That was one reason why we went away from Rome that winter; because mamma was so — judicious!"

"But you did not regret it?" said Hardinge quickly.

She smiled, putting up one tightly gloved little hand to adjust the rose-colored ribbon in her hood.

"I regretted his horse. He used to ride the most delightful horse, when we met him every day on the Pincio. That was when he was an officer in the Zouaves. We knew him very well. I had a great deal of influence over him in those days. Even mamma had to admit that my influence was very good. I made him give up riding on Sundays. He used to come to us instead. He always rode on Sunday after going to mass. He is very religious, you know."

"My dear Miss Damon, the man is a prodigy!"

"Do you really think so? But I don't believe that he ought to be allowed to marry Barbara. She always has ideas about things, — poor Barbara! She is sure to make mistakes. It is like that old story of the astronomer who kept looking at the stars and tumbled into ditches. Barbara is always looking out for stars. I think stars are all very well in their way, but I don't like ditches. Why do you laugh? I learned that story at school. I don't remember anything else that I learned there, but I remember that. I wish you would go and call on the Floyds oftener. Tell Mr. Lexeter to call. You were so delightfully rude to Cesco Lalli the other day at Ostia, about speaking French. And I am sure Mr. Lexeter does not like him. I want you both to go there a great deal. I want you to help me to take care of Barbara."

A movement of the crowd had thrown them close together.

"What is that, dear, that you are saying about taking care of me? Mr. Dix has been looking after me.

I am quite safe, you absurd little person," said Barbara, in her full and caressing voice, — a voice which made you turn your head and look at her if you caught its tone, through the confused chatter of a crowd, — and laying her hand affectionately upon Octave's arm.

Hardinge looked at her attentively for a minute.

"Ah, you had better speak to Lexeter," he murmured.

But Octave's remarks had had the effect of giving a significance to Count Lalli's movements. Hardinge felt interested. The next time they all met, a few evenings later, was at the house of a certain Madame Raimondi, a bright-eyed Scotchwoman, who had once written a *Primer or Introduction to the Study of Political Economy*; after which she drifted to Rome with the intention of studying art, and ended by marrying an Italian sculptor with a magnificent beard and an uncertain reputation. There was some story connected with their marriage, some opposition on the part of her friends, which gave an air of fictitious juvenility to the whole affair. Madame Raimondi was about forty; she led an extremely busy life. In the daytime she wore an unvarying costume of black and crimson, which was always to be seen prominently in the foreground of every one of those assemblages of amateur archæologists which all winter long preserve the Roman ruins from acquiring a bad social reputation for silence and solitude. In the intervals of her studies she painted semi-nude classical figures on the panels of her doors. She delighted in discuss-

ing the true proportions of the human figure. Her greatest ambition was to attend the life school in the Via Margutta, which her husband, however, prevented. What he could not prevent was her rolling up her sleeve on one occasion at a dinner-party, to support her argument by the actual illustration of a fore-shortened arm in movement. She had a fine round arm, and small plump hands. Her only other claim to personal attractiveness was in the whiteness of her throat. She always wore square-cut bodices in the evening, and her flat red face with its high cheek-bones looked not unlike a mask above the fairness of her neck. She never missed going to the Scotch church on a Sunday morning. She was a very kind-hearted woman, very fond of getting up concerts and charitable bazaars. At other times she devoted herself to giving Anglo-Italian conversazioni, — apparently for the purpose of proving how little her numerous friends desired to make one another's acquaintance.

She came up to Barbara now, immediately upon her entrance.

"There are whole hosts of people asking after you, my dear child. Ah, Octave. What a pretty dress, — pink, of course. I call it sweet champagne color. It is a pleasure to see some girls who have at least the sense to speak Italian. I have no patience with these people here. Why can't they talk in French then?"

"Ah, madame, *s'ils manquent de pain donnez leur donc de la galette*," said Hardinge, looking over her



shoulder with a smile. "I cannot shake hands with you, Miss Damon, the presence of extraneous matter forbids. I can only offer to direct your course to the tea-room from afar. Madame Raimondi has only invited her most intimate friends this evening. I think we are something less than five to the square inch."

"Go away, Mr. Hardinge, I will not have you monopolizing Miss Damon. Go away and make yourself agreeable to the Marchesina de Sanctis. I introduced you to her for that express purpose. I told her you were charming. She is a lovely creature, look at the way her head is put upon her throat! And she will have a dowry of a hundred thousand lire. I know it is a fact."

"I am not mercenary," said Hardinge, laughing. "And then Mademoiselle de Sanctis has a mamma. There is always a dragon watching over hidden treasure. Did you know that that is the authentic derivation of the great institution of the modern chaperon, Miss Damon? It is indeed. And to some scientific minds the difference between a dowager and a dragon —"

"Miss Maclean — Miss Janet Maclean — was asking for you a moment ago," said Madame Raimondi to Barbara; "what a wonderful old woman the sister is! I declare she does not look — Ah, cavaliere, *buona sera*. You will allow me to present to you the Cavaliere Marcantonio Borgia, Barbara dear? Miss Floyd speaks Italian like an angel."

"All angels speak Italian. You have proved it to

us, signora," the new-comer said, bowing gravely over his opera-hat.

Barbara glanced quickly at him and looked away again. Like all imaginative people she was capable of sudden antipathies. And it was impossible to suppose that there could ever be anything in common between one's self and a thick-shouldered young man who paid stupid compliments, and who asked such questions as, How the signorina liked Rome?

"I don't know. I have been here so long, I forget what I think of it."

"Ah, that explains the wonderful Italian. *Una cosa stupenda. Già, già.* Then the signorina has been here a long time?"

Barbara shut her fan and looked across the room at Miss Maclean.

"It is a fine city, Rome," the cavaliere added, putting up two yellow fingers to stroke his mustache. "A very interesting city. And there are many monuments of antiquity."

"A great many," said Barbara, feeling that to hear the average Italian speak of those monuments was like looking at the Coliseum on a mosaic breast-pin.

"*Già.* All built by the old Romans, — *inostrì padri.* All English are fond of monuments. The signorina is undoubtedly English?"

"American."

"Americana! is it then possible?" said Borgia dramatically — it was some months now since he had taken pains to inquire very minutely into Miss Floyd's family circumstances and presumable fortune. "Ah,

that too is a fine country. I know much about America. I have a cousin who has been to Nuova York."

"I am going about with a roving commission. I have orders to take you into the next room to listen to Ristori's recitation. But before that I must ask the lady with the three green feathers in her hair, if she will have a cup of tea," said Hardinge, passing close in front of them and looking down at Barbara with a confidential smile.

"I often see that young *forestiere* at the Café di Roma," remarked Borgia; "I see him speak to my friend Cesco Lalli. You who so well understand Italian, you should know my friend, Cesco Lalli, signorina."

He was apparently intent upon examining the lining of his opera-hat as he said this, and before he had time to lift his eyes to observe the effect of his shot, a hand was laid upon his shoulder, and a voice said, close behind him, —

"You are talking about me? I am indeed too much honored. Miss Floyd, I have the pleasure of wishing you good evening."

It was Lalli himself suddenly appearing in the doorway.

Barbara looked up and smiled without speaking. She was surprised and bewildered to feel her heart beating so precipitately that the commonest expression of greeting failed her; and the consciousness that he would see this made her blush hotly over cheek and throat, and say rather more quickly than usual, —

"Oh, I was not speaking of you. Mr. Borgia just mentioned that you knew Mr. Hardinge. He was here a moment ago. He is coming back for me."

"Shall I go at once?" asked Cesco with some bitterness. He threw back his head, and there was an ominous twitching about his nostrils. The cavaliere had turned away and was examining a photograph album.

"Oh, please do not speak in that way. You promised me not to speak in that way. And it is such a long while since I have seen you; surely you do not mean to begin by quarrelling with me?" said Barbara, again feeling that she was being hurried into saying all the wrong things and not knowing how to regain her equipoise, — the sisterly confidence and frankness which Lalli had asked for, which she had eagerly promised, and which was surely inconsistent with feeling like this? It was a miserable way of spoiling their first meeting under the new condition of things. It was almost a relief when Hardinge rejoined them and offered her his arm to move away. To Cesco's eyes she seemed to accept this change of companions without a moment's hesitation. She did not even turn her head to look back, and how was it possible for him to divine the keenness of the disappointment which had brought that brightness to her glance and fixed the flush upon her cheek? She could not so much as classify the feeling herself. She was only conscious of an intense depression, a blankness, — as of suddenly coming upon a dead wall in the place of the expected familiar outlook upon

sea and sky. And the very inexplicableness of the feeling gave her force to thrust it from her for the moment, banishing it as we banish all unexpected emotion which is strong enough to wait, to gather strength and importance by the very fact of its wilful suspense.

Her clearest formulated wish was the desire to see Lalli again, and alone, if it were only for a moment. It seemed as if the merest word, a look even, would be sufficient to dissipate this wretched sense of discomfort, which was like something in the air. It prevented her now from listening in any appreciable degree to Ristori's reading of Leopardi's Hymn to Italy. At any other time that cry of impassioned and resolute despair would have touched her "like the strong broken spirit of a wave," with power to stir her ardent imagination to all far-reaching impulses of pity and enthusiastic devotion. Now the words seemed meaningless and remote as the ceaseless roll of carriage-wheels outside a sick-room. There could, one would imagine, be no more condemnatory criticism of the quality of a personal emotion than this, — that it has shut one apart from the influence of what is vital to other human beings.

She did not see Lalli again that night. At the very moment that she was sitting there, her soft round cheek resting upon her hand, her eyes fixed upon the bunch of flowers on her lap, while her mind busied itself with constructing the most satisfactory detail of their next meeting later on, — for naturally they would be thrown together again in the course of the

evening, — Lalli was walking rapidly away through the silent moonlit street.

He was walking into the very heart of old Rome; past the deep-set silent spaces of the Forum, filled at this hour with a wan reflected radiance, so that the groups of delicate fluted columns rose lightly as if by enchantment into the silvery light, and the wild cloud-shadows of the windy March night flitted rapidly like ghosts across the worn marbles of the floor. He passed the Palace of the Cæsars; a nightingale was singing in the gardens. It was in the years before the Government had acquired an intelligent interest in antiquity, and there was still a double row of trees left standing where now we have the privilege of gazing upon an excavated road, and being confirmed in all our previous conceptions of Roman highways. Here, too, on that spring night, the wind was astir in the branches, and the shadows of the young leaves filled the long rustling avenue with a transparent shade. He stood beneath the Arch of Constantine; there was light enough to follow out the worn tracery of the triumphal bas-relief. Lalli sat down with his back to it. He could hardly have explained himself why he had chosen to come there. It was, he felt vaguely, what would have been appropriate to the hero of a French novel. But the Frenchman would undoubtedly have extracted some satisfaction — moral, immoral, or purely artistic — from the contemplation of the vast broken sweep of the Coliseum, seen under that effect of wildly shifting sky. Lalli looked at it with quite unaffected in-

difference. If any one had been there to see him he would have been perfectly aware of the picturesque relief of his handsome, arrogant profile against the moon-whitened stones, but he was far too simple-minded, at once too primitive and too practical, to have felt at any time the propriety of adopting a mental *pose*. He was sensitive and responsive only in matters of personal contact. He had never in his life conceived of an impersonal emotion. He stood unmoved before this great gaping ruin, — this hungry old mouth of death; this visible type of Rome, — blood-stained and empty. And to him it signified simply nothing; this place of fierce pleasures, this place of great agonies, was like any other.

If you will not pity him for this insensibility — and what exile can be more tragic than this complacent acceptance of the lesser impressions of life? — it may be well to remind you that he still had one potent claim left upon your sympathy, — he was very much in love with Barbara, and he had begun to despair of ever counting for anything in her life.

He had taken off his hat and laid it down upon the stones beside him. He stayed there for a long while, not knowing exactly where else to go. Everything seemed alike idle, distasteful, miserable. It never for an instant occurred to him to rebel against the sensation. Being in love, and hopelessly, seemed to him as much a fact calculated to disturb the ordinary tenor of his existence as if he had broken his arm in falling from his horse. He was indeed extremely unhappy.

## CHAPTER XII.

**H**ARDINGE was sauntering slowly down the Via del Venti Settembre. It was a favorite walk of his. He liked the quaint simplicity of some of its little churches ; he found pleasure in its long straight line of perspective, its suggestion of repose and exclusiveness. To him there was some secret and peculiar charm in the high-placed orange-trees of the Barbarini villa, and in the blind walls and silent convent-doors. The pleasure he took in it was something purely personal. For it is interesting, no doubt, to be walking easily on a soft spring afternoon along the very line of Nero's panic-stricken flight, past the high-walled gardens where Cardinal Bembo and the Humanists of Rome met and discoursed of all the bright new enthusiasms of the Renaissance, and in those early April days the Roman stillness had yet the added charm of contrast ; and to drive to the Porta Pia, to look at the scars and breaches made by the Italian cannon, was still one of the ordinary duties impressed upon the tourist mind. But to Hardinge's fancy the attraction lay farther on. A dozen yards beyond the brown old gates the pavement begins again. The walls are lower ; if one is idle one can sit down upon the parapet and look across fields of



corn and cane to a far blue range of hills and away and across the great rolling sweep of the Campagna. Hardinge had spent hours in this fashion. He liked lounging upon the low stone-wall in the sunshine, within hearing of the lazy talk of the soldiers and custom-house officers standing about the city gate; he liked looking up the broad road to Sant Agnese. It is a quarter for priests and convents. At times a cardinal's carriage would roll heavily by; Hardinge liked to watch it; he liked to observe the measured opening of the carriage-door, the slow descent of the black-robed ecclesiastic, the decorous mien of the sable-clad attendants. He found a delightful quality in the impression such a group made upon him. He did not resent the existence of the state of things implied, as Lexeter would have done; his keen practical mind derived a certain pleasure from the contemplation of the machinery of the Church. It interested him. When, in the course of his walks, he came across such a little procession defiling blackly across the sunny open road, he greeted it with an air of friendly amusement. "I bow to the established order of things. I take off my hat to method and organization," he said to Lexeter one day when they were walking together. He had made friends, in the course of his wanderings about Rome, with a certain Padre Bonifazio, one of the professors at the Propaganda, who had been recommended to Hardinge as a remarkable Greek scholar. Padre Bonifazio was from a little country town near Perugia. He was a man of about forty, with a fat and rather common face, full

of a certain simple good-nature, and large brown eyes, pathetic and beseeching like the eyes of a dog. He often went to Hardinge's rooms to read with him. Often Hardinge would do nothing but talk. Padre Bonifazio belonged to a church whose revenues had been confiscated by the Italian Government. He was reduced to extreme poverty, which he endured with the patient stoicism of a peasant. His great passion, after Greek, was shooting. When he was describing some expedition after snipe across the Campagna marshes, or a day's duck-shooting and the supper at night in a little osteria celebrated for its white wine, his eyes would fill with golden light, his face beamed with broad good-natured smiles, he thrust back his hanging black sleeves, and — "The water was so deep," he would say, gathering up the worn skirts of his shabby cassock, "and cold. Eh, eh! but those were good times, Signor 'Ardinge."

The young man was in the habit of keeping him for dinner. He amused himself by making tea for his guest in the evening. The padre considered it in the light of a medicinal beverage; he took a childish pleasure and pride in absorbing huge quantities of it, emptying the sugar-basin into his cup, and taking a pinch of snuff between each swallow. Sometimes Lexeter, coming home late at night, would still find the two sitting before the fire, the padre perhaps dozing gently, with his blue and white checked pocket-handkerchief spread carefully over his knee, his fat hands folded softly together, and a placid air of satisfaction — the effect of unwonted food, and warmth,

and light—pervading his whole being. Hardinge would be seated in the opposite arm-chair, smoking, or buried over some book; from time to time he lifted his eyes from its pages, and his keen and somewhat sarcastic glance would fall upon his companion's large, unconscious form, and rest there with a curious expression of mingled amusement and reflection.

"I call you an argument in favor of the endowment of Research. You are not a bad sort of fellow after all, Hardinge. It is not every social naturalist who provides for his insects after pinning them," Lexeter observed, coming in later than usual one evening. Lexeter was always late in his hours. His entrance was the signal for Padre Bonifazio's departure. The good-natured priest was ill at ease with Lexeter. If they spoke much together he became confused; he would stand smiling, rubbing his forehead gently with the blue checked pocket-handkerchief while Lexeter made the most inoffensive remarks.

"*Già, già.* But I depart. I remove the obstacle; *gli levo l'incomodo,*" he said, at the first possible opportunity.

"I don't call the dear old boy an insect; he is my favorite sea-anemone. You find him a little gray spot of hardness; you don't know how he blossoms out in safe quarters," Hardinge observed, laughing.

It was a matter of course to this young fellow that he should be liked wherever he was known; it was nothing new, it was a common fact,—like the daylight. He was continually aware of giving pleasure. And to be young, to be not yet three-and-twenty, to

be conscious of a degree of cleverness which gave one the right to be critical concerning the quality of one's experiences, to feel one's self an interesting, a delightful ingredient of life, and yet to be free from all uneasy conceit, all sense of straining effort, — what could he have asked for more? Lulled by the warm, fitful stirring of the wind, his eyes filled with the color of the spring day, his thoughts moved about easily, seeming only made to rest upon agreeable objects, and that lightly. For instance, he thought of Octave, but she would hardly have been gratified could she have seen the incipient smile which filled his eyes as he remembered some words which he had been reading.

"Francesco Sforza was used to say that there are three cases in life wherein human wisdom availeth little," he murmured softly, looking towards a waving patch of golden-tinted canes. "Should one desire to take unto one's self a wife, to buy a horse, or invest in a melon, the wise man will recommend himself to Providence and draw his bonnet down over his eyes."

He looked confidentially over at the reeds rising straightly up into the burning sunshine. "I am King Midas. I am growing classical," he thought. Octave would certainly not have liked it, but there was perfect contentment upon the young fellow's face as he lounged upon his sunny wall that afternoon. Sometimes he lay back, clasping his hands behind his head in his favorite attitude, and staring up at the deep, limpid softness of the sky; sometimes he turned his eyes towards the peaceful blue lines of the hills. At

one moment the sound of footsteps on the road made him change the direction of his glance; even at this distance there seemed something familiar in the air and gait of the approaching figure. He looked again, and rose lightly to his feet, with some slight exclamation of surprise. He had recognized Miss Floyd in this solitary, quick-stepping pedestrian.

She was walking rapidly along, with her face turned away from him and her eyes fixed upon the distant fields. He was standing close beside her, he spoke before she was aware of his presence, and then she started suddenly and stood still. The color rushed to her face.

"Did I frighten you? But I am glad I met you. I was waiting for the gods to send me a companion. We can walk out towards Sant Agnese together," he said confidently, thrusting his hands into his pockets and looking at her with a pleased and friendly air.

He had always liked Barbara. He had only heard Lexeter speak of her once; but even on that solitary occasion he had been struck by his tone of admiration and respect. And since Octave's confidences at the opera he had always felt a little curious.

He suggested now that they should have a walk through some lanes which he had lately discovered and which were close at hand.

"I came out by myself," began Barbara, looking at him doubtfully.

The fact was that Margherita had been making some observations to which it had not pleased the young girl to listen. Now, as she remembered them,

her cheeks flushed again. Hardinge stood looking at her. "After all, we are Americans, you know," he said, smiling.

The lanes to which he led the way turn sharply off from the Porta Pia, passing under the high old city walls. For two or three minutes they walked on in silence, then the narrow road took a sudden turn; a feeling of freshness, the breath of damp earth, the smell of a wood filled the air about them. They walked between branching hedgerows, and trees leaned from the high steep banks until the branches met. The damp cool road was full of shadow-loving growths, — great flat green leaves, ivy, and beds of rank coarse fern. And farther on, where the sunlight dappled the ground, the cyclamen grew in the moss, and there were violets. They had passed out of Rome, out of Italy, into the very heart of a leafy English lane.

"Ah!" said Barbara, drawing a long breath of satisfaction.

They moved on more slowly through the cool, transparent shadow. It was all so still. A thrush was singing somewhere in the coverts.

"It was Carson who discovered the place one day out sketching; young Carson, the painter I was telling you about the other day."

"I know," said Barbara; "the man from some little place out West."

"Ah," said Hardinge, thrusting his stick into the rotten stump of a tree, "he is uncommonly clever, I can tell you; I should like to show you some little things he has done. There is a particular bit of distance a little farther on —"

They had come out upon higher ground. Behind them were the mossy stone gates of a farm. They went on a few paces, the road narrowed to a mere footpath. They were half-way up the side of a hill. They looked off upon miles of Campagna, — a great, sunny, grassy sweep of rolling land. Beyond this rose the pale, luminous profile of the Alban mountains, still snowy-crested above the olive groves. Here and there a white-walled village nestled in some folding of the hills. Nearer at hand were scattered villas, and formal avenues of cypress, and slender flat-topped pines. And above them rose a limpid, stainless sky. The wide landscape was bathed and drowned in light, — pure light, — a tempered splendor.

Barbara had taken off her hat and gloves. They sat by the roadside together; Hardinge had flung himself down on the long deep grass at her feet.

"Confess that you are glad that I brought you here!" he demanded.

"I am glad," said Barbara softly.

A loose branch of wild rose was swaying in the wind above her uncovered head. The little leaves made shadows on her neck and hair. Hardinge looked up at her and smiled. They spoke together in undertones. He had begun telling her again about young Carson, and then their talk drifted away to a peasant who was laboring in the fields below them, — the solitary bit of human life visible, — a patient bowed figure of toil.

"There are some things I can never understand," Hardinge remarked reflectively.

He picked up a bit of grass and examined it and began twisting it about his finger as he spoke. "Why expect gratitude and self-control, the supreme result of a tempered civilization, from the lowest orders? People are so horribly hard on each other. For myself, I devoutly believe in the division of the world into a question of temperaments."

He put out his hand and caught one of the swaying branches of the rose-tree; he began stripping it mechanically of its leaves. Barbara glanced at him and half put out her hand and drew it back. He went on speaking.

"I believe too in the existence of the artistic temperament—the powerful impulse towards margin, luxury, the need of sensation—without the remotest hint of artistic expression. The same passionate feeling for life which makes a poet of one man can make a drunken navvy of another. I have seen a workman as extravagant on five shillings as his betters on a thousand pounds. I could never understand why extreme penury was expected to include all the virtues? But people will never allow for differences of temperament below a certain income. Personality to them represents a taxable luxury,—like powdered hair. No one cares to distinguish shades of difference in the drab-colored dreariness of poverty."

"But are you never insensible yourself?" said Barbara, arching her eyebrows playfully. She looked at the scattered leaves on the ground. "See what you have been doing! and it was so happy growing there in the sun."



"Ah," said Hardinge, "if I had not been with you, I should have walked on and left the rose-bush growing. But two happy people always imply the misery of some shadowy third. That is one of those little beneficent arrangements —"

He stopped short and turned suddenly and broke the rose off close to the ground.

"Give it to me. I will take it home and put it in water."

"And prolong its agony? But of course you will, because you see it suffering. The chief result of having suffered a great deal seems to be the capacity for suffering more."

"At least of suffering for others," said Barbara softly.

He looked at her. The ineffable languor and charm of the spring was all about them, in the warm fitful wind, in the stainless sky, in the very smell of the new grass at her feet. He looked at her. "The day is so beautiful! Is that wise?"

He began speaking of self-sacrifice, — of its futility. "I am an outsider, a Philistine; Lexeter is always telling me that I am a Philistine. I am the advocate of all the bourgeois facts and virtues," he said; and then they both laughed. They felt very happy.

The afternoon slipped away as if by enchantment. "I must be going soon; I promised Octave to stop there on my way home," Barbara observed at last. But even then it was some time before they moved. The sky was growing roseate at the horizon, and the pines cast long slender shadows on the grass. There

was a sound of bells from the far white belfry of a convent; and the voices of the laborers returning homeward came cheerfully across from the nearest farm.

The nightingales were singing loudly now in the thickets. They stood still to listen. There was a sound of light wheels, the slow footfall of a tired horse drawing nearer. "I did not know that any one ever passed here," Barbara observed idly. She neither changed her attitude nor turned her head to look.

The man who was driving came up slowly behind them. He had seen and recognized them from a long distance. There was a break in the hedge now; a flood of golden light was pouring in, shining on Barbara's white hands, on Hardinge's uncovered head as he strolled along by her side. She was still holding the long trailing branch of leaves. The red dazzle was full upon both their faces as they turned and stood back to let the carriage pass them. There was a rattle of wheels, a jerk, and the light trap rolled quickly away over the jagged cart-ruts.

"But — was that not — ? Surely — surely I know that man's face. It was Cavaliere Borgia. And he must have recognized us?" Barbara said slowly.

She was silent for a moment, and then the color rose to her cheeks. "Do you suppose — I wonder if he thought there was anything out of the way in my walking here with you, alone? Italians don't, you know," she said, looking gravely at him with an air of serious, childlike confidence.

"But we are Americans," said Hardinge promptly,

meeting her glance of inquiry with perfect seriousness. Inwardly he was raging at the impertinence to which she had been exposed.

He made a great effort to continue the conversation on its former footing; but it was difficult not to speak with more warmth. The slight which had been offered her seemed to demand a certain counterbalancing emphasis of personal admiration. He insisted upon seeing her to the very door of the Damons' house. He walked away down the street, after bidding her farewell, tingling all over with fervid respect for this sweet, gentle-natured creature, and a desire to go out and do battle for her sake. He was but three-and-twenty, remember; and to fulfil the code of a lofty chivalry was one of the requisites necessary to his easy, princely pleasure in being.

Barbara did not stay long at the Damons'. But something else had reached home before herself, and was awaiting her arrival.

"There is a letter awaiting the signorina," Margherita explained ceremoniously, standing in the doorway with her hands wrapped up in her apron, and an ostentatious air of making an important statement. "It was left by Luigi, the manservant of the Signor Conte Lalli. I know no more. I have asked no questions. Since the signorina prefers walking alone and leaving me to spend hours looking out of window for her, with my heart in my mouth, not knowing what might happen — But, *basta così!* I have nothing more to say. And to think of the poor dear signor padrone away there in Florence, little

dreaming of the dangers the signorina — But I say no more; no, not if I were asked in the confessional. Not another word. I hope I know my duty to the signorina better than to weary her by complaining."

She rolled her hands tighter in her apron, and the sentence ended huskily in a sob.

"Don't, Margherita, there's a good woman, don't cry. I was not walking alone, Mr. Hardinge was with me. I was quite safe. And Mrs. Damon sent me home in a cab," Barbara added rather hastily.

She sat down and pushed the soft loose hair back from her forehead, eying the letter on the table beside her. She felt no particular disinclination to read it; but for the moment Lalli and all which concerned him seemed to have lost something of its actuality. She had been living in another mental atmosphere, on another side of her nature. It required an effort to return to the exact focus of interest in him.

But now she broke the seal. The note ran briefly as follows:—

"I cannot come to your father's house after his treatment of me. Yet I should like to see you once more to say farewell. After what has passed, you will not be surprised to hear that I am going to fight a duel; and something tells me that I shall not escape with my life. I am glad of it. I am sick of existence (*sono stufo di questa vita*); you alone could have made it tolerable, and you would not. I do not reproach you,—'tis fatality; but I should like to see you once again. After that, what matters? I would

give you my life to amuse yourself with, as I would give you anything else which I had.

"I shall be on the Pincian to-morrow morning at seven o'clock. *Later than seven it will be too late.*

"CESCO LALLI."

She laid the paper down very softly. She turned abruptly away, and walked over to the window and stood looking down into the street. It was growing dusk, but the sky was still reddened above the convent roof. A bell rang suddenly and sharply from the convent belfry. She could see its black vibrating silhouette against the rosy flush of the sky. And, possibly, at this same hour to-morrow night — She pressed her hands, suddenly, hard against her face. She had just remembered that her father was away in Florence. Barbara was alone.

## CHAPTER XIII.

ONE of Mr. Floyd's few personal friends was a certain Monsieur Simon, an old Frenchman, an ex-officer of infantry, compromised in the *émeute* of '48 in Lyons, and now settled in Rome and teaching Latin and French at twenty sous the hour. No one knew his precise age; he was probably about sixty, very large and robust. One could imagine that he had been handsome as a young man; his eyes were dark and steady, and his thick gray hair was brushed away in heavy sculpturesque folds. A bitter and impotent sense of injustice had moulded all his features. He contemplated the world with the unchanging, despairing scorn of a tragic mask. He had always been in the right, and had always contrived to appear in the wrong; it was partly perhaps the fault of his intense and overbearing manner; in his own regiment he had been personally unpopular. When he was acquitted by court-martial, not a man stepped forward to shake hands with him. He left the court-room in the midst of an absolute silence. He spent a day and a night shut up in his quarters, with what thoughts Heaven only knows. At the end of that time he sent for his orderly to carry to the colonel his letter of resignation. He was still under

forty when he sent in his papers and left the army, a marked man. For a little while he remained in Lyons. Occasionally his old comrades met him in the streets, but he was never known to have given one of them the smallest sign of recognition. After some months he disappeared entirely, — absolutely, like a stone dropped into deep water. Some people said that he was dead, others that he had gone to Algiers and enlisted as a Zouave under a false name. In fact, he had come to Italy. The journey there had exhausted what was left of his small savings. He tried many means of supporting himself. His exactitude, his perfect loyalty, his incorruptible honesty, made of him a most valuable assistant, but his violent and suspicious nature invariably finished by rendering all relations to his employers intolerable. He ended by giving lessons. His chief pupils were a family of little boys, the sons of a French wine-merchant. He gave himself an incredible amount of trouble over his lessons, but he had not the gift of teaching. His daily bread was bread of bitterness.

He had never married. He lived alone in one large empty room at the top of a steep and dirty Roman staircase. What little attendance he required was given him by his landlady, but for the most part he did the greater share of the work himself; rising very early in the gray morning to make up his bed, and sweep out his room, and prepare the coffee for his scanty breakfast. The tragic absurdity of his position was never more apparent than at these moments. To see him solemnly proceed to dust his

chamber, an old foraging-cap upon his head, a narrow and faded dressing-gown buttoned tightly about him, without relaxing a muscle or changing for an instant the gloomy defiance of his severe countenance, it was impossible to avoid laughing. For all his life the old man had never been able to do anything easily; his deepest misfortunes were never allowed to rise above the level of the ridiculous. As a rule he carefully avoided meeting any of his countrymen. The only house which he frequented was Mr. Floyd's. On Sunday he brushed his coat more carefully than ever. He always went to the Protestant Church. He had been brought up as a Roman Catholic; his family at one time had been possessed of some interest in the Church, but in that, as in everything else, he had gone against the current. He read the Bible constantly. He had also an edition of Racine; some volumes of music, of which he was passionately fond; and a complete collection of Victor Hugo's works. A little cracked plaster cast of the poet as he appeared in '48, and a violin, were almost the only records the old ex-officer had left of his former life.

Lexeter was the first stranger who had ever been admitted to his room. They had met in the beginning at Mr. Floyd's house, and Lexeter had soon acquired the habit of dropping in at odd hours to light his pipe and talk. Monsieur Simon never smoked.

On one of these occasions lately Lexeter had found the old man sitting before his little work-table gazing helplessly and painfully at the pile of blotted



copy-books he held in his swollen and trembling old hands. He had had an attack of fever in the night, but had risen as usual, and was even now laboriously striving to accomplish his daily task-work.

It was not without difficulty that Lexeter persuaded him to return to his bed. For several days he violently and successfully opposed calling any doctor in, but at the end of that time he suddenly collapsed. His old dogged determination gave way in one moment. It was one night when Lexeter was sitting by his bedside; the old man had been lying speechless and motionless for more than an hour. Above his bed there hung a small framed photograph of Barbara, taken when she was a child. It was the only ornament in the room. Lexeter was looking at it musingly, lost in thought, when a sudden movement in the bed attracted his attention. The old man had half risen on one elbow; his steady, piercing eyes were fixed on Lexeter.

"She is good," he said painfully. "It is a true heart, a faithful soul."

He lifted one heavily veined hand from the coverlet; he raised it feebly, still looking at Lexeter.

"*Vous l'aimez bien, n'est ce pas ?* And you, too, love her?" he murmured.

Lexeter hesitated a moment.

"Yes," he said gravely.

Monsieur Simon contemplated him for an instant in silence. An ineffable expression of sweetness had come over his rugged features. "*Elle est si bonne. Je l'ai bien aimée, moi,*" he murmured again, sinking back upon his pillow.

When next he spoke it was to ask that a doctor should be summoned. To Lexeter's astonishment he proved a most docile patient. Even in delirium the old soldier's instincts of obedience and punctuality never entirely forsook him.

Once or twice, when the fever was at its worst, Lexeter remained with him until daybreak. The night of the day on which Barbara and Hardinge walked in the lanes together was one of these occasions. It was after six o'clock when Lexeter left the old man's room. The fresh morning air tasted like wine after the strain and fatigue of the night's watching. Lexeter directed his steps towards the Pincian hill. It was a crisp cool morning. The air was chilled and vivified by the rain. The sky looked blue, intensely blue, like enamel, stained with large white clouds, clear-edged, as if they had been painted there. The sun shone brightly on the vacant spaces and deserted gravel walks; here and there a gardener was already awake and at work among the bushes. Small birds were hopping about the garden-paths; they flew away with a quick flutter of wings at Lexeter's approach. All the spring world was fresh and alert and vital. The coolness of the dawn still lingered on the leaves.

Lexeter threw himself down on a retired bench in front of a bust of Leopardi. He began by taking off his hat and lighting a cigar. He had a late copy of the newspaper for which he wrote in his pocket. He unfolded it leisurely and glanced up and down the columns, but a singular deadness, a flatness as of a

worn-out tale, seemed to pervade its pages. He began to think of old Simon ; of Barbara's photograph ; of what the doctor had said —

A young German couple, come to spend their honeymoon in Rome, passed close before him. They were taking an early constitutional preparatory to a day's work among the museums. The girl was rather pretty. She looked at him with shy, kindly blue eyes from under the broad rim of her hat. There was something in her smile which reminded him of Barbara. It was three days now, he reflected, since he had been to call at the Floyds'. He would go there this afternoon. The commonest politeness required as much as that of him.' He would go about five o'clock, when he was sure of finding her in. He would go to carry her news of Monsieur Simon. The old man's look and tone of tenderness recurred to him. "Ah, yes, *elle est bien bonne*," he murmured.

He stooped to pick up the paper which had fallen, rustling, from his knees to the ground. As he lifted his head, the first person his eyes rested upon was Barbara herself. She was alone, she was coming rapidly towards him. Her face was very pale. She was looking straight at him and smiling. He had time to see all this as he rose to his feet.

She stood still in front of him. She did not give him her hand. The smile seemed fixed upon her lips.

"I was crossing over there," she said, without any preliminary greeting, raising her hand for a moment and then letting it fall heavily to her side. She kept

her large clear eyes upon his face. "I saw you from the farther side. You did not see me." She hesitated for an instant. "I did not like to be here without you knowing it. I did not expect to see you."

"I am going away," Lexeter said hastily.

He carefully avoided looking at her. What he felt was an indescribable mixture of pain, of humiliation, and sorrow.

"I did not know you came here in the morning," Barbara went on. There was a slight tremor in her low full voice which thrilled through him like a touch of physical anguish. He told her how he had been spending the night.

She clasped her hands together quickly. For the first time the fixed smile left her pale lips.

"And you do not believe he will get better?"

"Better perhaps. I hope so, — I believe so. But probably he will never be quite himself again. Practically, he has done with life. It is a hard world. It has been a hard world for him," said Lexeter, with sudden bitterness.

She stood silent for a moment, looking at the ground. When she lifted her face her lips were quivering.

"I should like you to know, Mr. Lexeter — I wish you would believe — oh, don't you understand? I saw you a long way off, and I came to tell you that I was here," said poor Barbara, putting her hand up to her lips and looking at him appealingly. "I cannot tell you why I am here. It is not my secret. But I thought it was best. I *had* to come." She turned

her head away abruptly. "I thought that you would understand," she said.

"Ah!" said Lexeter, making an involuntary movement backwards. The revulsion of feeling was so strong that for a minute he could find no terms in which to express himself. He took her hand in his, and, for the only time in his life, he kissed it.

"There is nothing which you are capable of doing or thinking which I do not approve of, my dear," he said simply. And then, with sudden, uncontrollable passion of regret and infinite tenderness, "God bless you, little Barbara!" he said.

He purposely avoided looking after her. He stood, when she left him, staring at the bust of Leopardi. Here, in this presence, the most passionate desire of his life had fallen down — dead. The mute marble gaze of the dead young poet seemed watching him as he turned and passed away.

Barbara crossed over to the opposite avenue. Lalli was seated there, on a bench, waiting for her. He rose at her approach. He too was pale, but at the sound of her footstep a smile of triumph had passed like light into his eyes.

"Barbara!"

Their eyes met. Barbara began to tremble violently. This was not what she had expected.

"Take my arm. You are frightened. There is nothing to frighten you, dearest." He drew her hand under his arm. "I will take you to where there is no chance of your being seen," he said.

He led her to a seat farther away, on the hillside.

Here there was a clear space of grass, and then a ring of fir-trees shutting in the round, shallow basin of a fountain. The wind scarcely stirred the dark tops of the pines. There was no sound but the sound of their own footsteps on the freshly laid gravel. The water of the fountain rose and fell again in one smooth, glittering, noiseless arch. She followed passively, as in some dream. The very fact of their being there together, alone, at that hour of the morning, cast a spell of unreality about her. It was impossible to speak.

They sat down. Barbara was holding her closed parasol with both hands. After a moment he took it gently away from her, still without speaking. He laid it down upon the bench beside him, and turned and covered her cold and trembling fingers with his own warm hand.

"Dearest!"

She lifted her eyes slowly to his face.

"I knew that you would come. — Because you love me," Lalli murmured, with a long pause between the words.

"I —" She disengaged one hand abruptly, and pressed it hard against her lips. Why was she here, then, if she did not love him? She fixed her gaze upon the glittering, sinuous motion of the fountain. She tried to collect her thoughts, but they glided imperceptibly away from her; she could realize nothing, feel nothing, but the power of his dark, appealing gaze.

There was a nearing sound of voices, but Lalli did

not change his attitude. An elderly man and his wife, Italian shopkeepers by their appearance, emerged suddenly from between the trees. The woman was holding the leading-strings attached to a little child, her grandchild apparently. The little boy ran forward, with a cry of delight, to the glittering water. He was dressed in a knitted costume of blue-and-white wool. As he stood with his back to them, Barbara could see that his sturdy little legs were encased in stockings of different colors.

"Andiamo. *C'è gente. Veni, Peppino, non far il cattivo!* (don't be naughty,)" the grandmother said, with an admonitory tug at the strings. The toddling creature passed close in front of Barbara. Lalli had not moved his hand. The child stood still, gazing at them with round, expressionless eyes.

"Andiamo!" the woman repeated. The old man was resting, leaning on his stick. He started at the word, like a horse which feels the whip.

The little procession passed away behind the trees. They neither of them referred to it, and yet each felt tacitly that the commonplace passage of these people had been an event.

Barbara was the first to speak.

"I came because you wrote to me. Because you were in trouble. I came to help you. You—you wrote to me that you were going to fight a duel," she said, with increasing agitation.

He did not answer immediately. He appeared to ignore her agitation.

"You are so beautiful. I know that you love me.

Say that you love me, Barbara!" he said entreatingly.

And then, for an instant, she realized how utterly circumstances had passed beyond her control. For the first time she was aware of the crushing pressure of a stronger and more unscrupulous nature. Two large tears rose slowly to her eyes. She turned to him instinctively, like a frightened child.

"But indeed I believed that I could help you by coming. You know you said that I could be to you like your sister," she said entreatingly. But she felt herself the futility of such pleading. What had she to oppose to his tenacity of will? "Pray, pray tell me what has happened to you," she said.

"I have insulted Borgia. He said that he had met you outside of Rome, walking alone with Hardinge, at nightfall. I gave him the lie," Lalli answered, half indifferently.

"But it was true. Oh, what can I do!" she said, looking at him helplessly. She felt that all her future could only be decided by his answer.

"What does it matter now?" he asked.

He took both her hands into one of his, and with the other he pressed her cheek gently down against his shoulder.

"You know that you love me, Barbara — *Barbaram*," he said.

Half an hour later, as they were parting, she unfastened a ribbon about her throat, and drew from under her dress a large, old-fashioned gold locket.

"It is my own hair when I was a baby. *Mamma*



put it there. It is like giving you all my old life as well, Cesco," she said softly.

He paid no attention to what she was saying. He was looking at her flushed face with a passionate delight.

"You are so beautiful!" he told her, stooping down to kiss the soft white hands fastening the trinket to his watch-chain.

Already there was difference in their emotion.

But as they stood hand in hand, looking at each other, it was difficult not to believe in future happiness for these two young creatures. Each was so sure of the other. It was a sacramental moment of life.

## BOOK II.

### IN DEEP WATERS.

"Ah, then we awoke with a sudden start  
From our deep dream, and saw, too late,  
How bare the rock, how desolate,  
On which we had cast our precious freight."

BROWNING.

. . . . "Ce que vaut un tel rêve,  
Et quel est le néant d'un avenir fini !"

VICTOR HUGO, *Ode à Napoléon.*



## CHAPTER XIV.

**D**ISAPPOINTMENT is not hardest to bear in its first moments. It is not while newly awakened energy is strong to struggle that loss is least endurable. Surely to know the very bitterness of sorrow it must be resting, a lifeless weight, upon the life it crushes. For trouble is perhaps never so intolerable as when it is taken for granted; one's own acceptance of deprivation growing more difficult in mathematical proportion to the acquiescence of one's neighbors. And let us not fall into the common error of estimating suffering by its apparent intensity; I think it highly probable that there have been martyrs who would have found it impossible to submit to chronic rheumatism.

I chose therefore to show you Barbara again, when more than a year has elapsed from the time of her marriage, rather than to ask you to contemplate with me those earlier months' of mental doubt, and stress, and slow readjustment. On this breathless August afternoon, when we find her again, in her favorite resting-place, beside the willow-bordered stream which flows past the door of her new home, it is probable that, of all the circle of people whom her marriage in any way affected, she is the only one left who still

considers that any vital change can yet take place in her experience and view of life.

And to Barbara's eyes the subtle, deadening spell of habit has already begun to weave its charm about her, making her find companionship and a sense of common association in the murmur of the water and the familiar roundness of the grassy hills.

The Lallis had only spent one month in Rome since their marriage. It had been Barbara's wish that they should settle at his house in the country. On one occasion — it was some two or three weeks before the wedding-day — they had ridden out with Mr. Floyd to look at this place, half manor-house and half farm, which had belonged to Cesco's mother. It was a long, low, stone building, enclosing three sides of an empty courtyard. The house had once been painted white. At one end a flight of wooden steps led up to a wide veranda, with four wooden pillars, painted to imitate marble, from which the stucco had long since peeled away. From this veranda you entered directly upon an immense hall, with cross-beams overhead, and innumerable small windows. One end of this hall had been partitioned off, years ago, as a sort of boudoir. A heavy faded silk curtain hung across the entrance, and within were faded chairs of the style of the Empire, and a narrow straight-backed sofa and working-table drawn into the embrasure of the farther window. A row of family portraits hung high up against the wall; the most noticeable among them was the portrait of a young woman with dark eyes, in the dress of forty

years ago. The artist had painted her against a background of blue sky, smiling agreeably and looking at a rose.

"That was my mother; it was done before her marriage," Cesco said, following the direction of Barbara's glance.

"Ah! Do you know she reminds me a little of your cousin, your beautiful cousin whom I met at Bracciano; don't you remember? There is certainly a family likeness. Or don't you see it? Perhaps you know your cousin's face too well to understand what I mean?"

"Regina is married now," Lalli said. And then he added hurriedly, "But you have only to tell me what changes you will have made. Here is my mother's private oratory."

He opened the door of a very small whitewashed room. The altar had been stripped of all its decorations; there was only a series of square marks on the wall where the sacred images had hung; and in one corner the dead woman's *prie dieu* was resting with its face to the wall.

"I remember the last time I came here. I have not seen this place since I was a boy. What will you do with it? It will be of no use to you like this."

"I should like it kept as your mother left it," Barbara said softly. She went up and laid her hand upon the bare boards. The dust lay thick beneath her fingers. The sun-warmed air came in at the open doorway like the living breath of a younger world.

"You shall do what you like with that — with me

— with everything," Cesco said, looking into her face and laying his strong hand for a moment upon hers.

"I shall do what you like," Barbara said shyly.

He clasped her hand more firmly across the empty altar. Neither of them knew how long they stood in that way. Who can measure the duration of a pulse of happiness?

But presently, when they had strolled out again into the tepid spring afternoon, Lalli began to speak more in detail of their future plan of living. "As for myself, I should ask for nothing better than to live with you on a desert island for all the days of my life," he said. "You are all I can ever wish for. But in this dull place, you will feel the change, Barbara."

He looked down absently at the stream flowing past their feet. They were standing in a small grassy enclosure, which had been planted out as a sort of summer bower in the days of Cesco's grandfather. There was still a formal circle of ilexes, which yet showed traces in their uncouth shapes of years of former clipping; there was a stone bench yet standing, and a round stone table supported by a griffin, and in one corner of the enclosure the broken statue of a nymph leaned over the discolored marble basin of a fountain, into which a few drops of water were forever trickling from the shattered urn. The trees and underbrush had been cleared away to the water's edge; across the little stream, as far as one could see, were rolling waving fields of wheat, whitening and shining with the sun and wind.

"I have told your father that I did not care for any dowry — any money," Lalli added suddenly, sitting down on the edge of the table and looking up at her.

"No," said Barbara simply. And then she added, turning her eyes towards him gratefully, "You knew that my father would have to go to America for that, and that there would be some business arrangements connected with poor mamma's fortune which — which would hurt him. It is very good of you to spare him. It is so good to feel that our happiness does not mean any one else's pain, is it not?"

"You are an angel!" said Cesco, looking at her passionately. It made very little difference to him what she said. Any words spoken in those soft, caressing tones were adorable. And as for Mr. Floyd's money, he felt that he had comported himself throughout that interview in a manner which would have appeared striking and chivalric to any audience. He had acted *en vrai gentilhomme*. And, later on, such affairs always arranged themselves. For one thing, time reduced them to questions of business. But that was no reason for depriving one's self of the pleasure of having expressed noble sentiments. But perhaps the greatest drawback to disinterested eloquence lies in the memories of the hearers. For instance, that same morning, in speaking of some of his new arrangements, Lalli had mentioned Marcantonio Borgia.

"Because he was once your dearest friend, I wish I could help disliking him," Barbara said thoughtfully. And then some sudden impulse made her ask,



"Did it ever occur to you that he was in love with your beautiful cousin — with Regina?"

"Why?" asked Lalli calmly.

"Oh, from the way he spoke of her once. And she is so very beautiful. I think I never saw any one so beautiful. I should be in love with her myself if I were a man."

"You see all men are not of your opinion. *I* am in love with *you*," said Lalli playfully. "But," he added, "you need not see Borgia again unless you like."

"But I thought he was your best friend. And surely you will not let me come between you and the people you have always cared about?" she said earnestly.

"Is there any friend like you?" Lalli asked, standing up, bending his handsome head, and kissing the palm of her hand.

And then, as they walked together towards the house, he added carelessly, "You know I have told you that my cousin is married. Her husband is one of the new deputies. They will soon be living in Rome. See, there is your father looking for us!"

These were some of the words Barbara remembered. However changed their relations to one another, moments such as these had existed between them, moments of sacramental faith and enthusiasm. This memory served now as warning. Those emotions indeed were dead—they were ghosts; but ghosts can act as guardians to a tomb.

To Barbara's loving and loyal nature it seemed

sufficient that such things had been. The light of that spring morning was not more irrecoverable. But she dreaded nothing now so much as what might seem to desecrate that past.

For the last two or three days, she had been alone at the *tenuta*. Lalli had driven into Rome—on business. It had become his custom to go there more and more frequently of late. And Barbara was glad of anything which seemed to provide him with interest and occupation. She was expecting his return; from where she sat she could see a small distant piece of the road by which the carriage must pass. Everywhere else her eye rested upon great rolling fields of grain. It was mid-August. The afternoon sky was of a hard purplish blue. The trees were dark and thick and motionless. On the opposite hill, in the sunshine, the corn was ablaze with scarlet poppies, and dusky patches of lupin, and rank-white daisies of the second growth. Under the willows the little stream ran low, half choked with the rank exuberance of the water-flags. Nature was in one of her practical, housewifely phases; at this season she ceased to be a goddess. The sweet irresponsibility of spring, the glad rioting of early summer, were alike forgotten; a healthy, steady, unbroken intention of growth and abundance and repletion was expressed by all the country side. The woods about the house were the only trees for miles around. There was no village in sight,—only one field of ripening grain following another.

In this afternoon silence, Barbara could hear the

voices of the men about the stables, the voices of two peasants trudging along the road on the opposite side of the river; the distant barking of a dog. Then silence again, the heavy silence of prosperous inaction. There was nothing now to do but wait until the harvest was ripened.

Once the stillness was broken by the sound of slow-moving wheels. A yoke of oxen, huge white creatures with long, shining, curved horns, "serene moving animals, teaching content," such as she had often seen in the streets of Rome when she was a girl, passed close beside her bower, dragging an empty hay-cart. The driver touched his battered hat.

"A beautiful day for the crops, signora contessa!"

And then again all was silent but the hot buzzing sound of a bee beyond the ilex-trees, in the sunshine, and the monotonous drip, drip of the fountain watched over by the broken-armed nymph.

"I suppose that the others are living somewhere?" she said to herself once or twice vaguely. But there was nothing in her surroundings to awaken any desire for sharing in a fuller sense of life. What could the meeting of her old friends and companions lead to but a more perfect understanding of the limitations of her future? Each time she had seen her father of late it had been more difficult to part from him composedly. And she shrank with terror from any question which might lead to criticisms of the past.

"What I care for, more than I care for anything else, is to keep that safe," she thought, clasping her hands together and looking down at the silent brown

water. She choked back a half-sob, but there was no one to hear her. There was no one to see how piteously childish she looked with the great tears gathering slowly on her lashes. "This has only come to me while I am very young. That is all the difference. Sorrow comes to every one. I have always known that. Why, even Mr. Hardinge told me that," she said, half smiling.

But the recollection of that careless, happy companionship of theirs, under the spring trees, on that memorable walk, made the present contrast too poignant. It was like looking back at all possibilities of tender devotedness and ardent admiration from across a grave. Hardinge was inextricably associated in her mind with all the ideals which at one time had seemed to give life its meaning. One day, not long after their marriage, Lalli had offered to show her an old packet of love-letters, — the relics of one of his dead-and-gone passions. She had refused with a sort of terror to look at them, and since then she had always sedulously tried to forget it, but at moments like these the remembrance returned with a sickening force.

"But all men are not like that. They are not!" she protested to herself with passionate conviction. And Hardinge's clear-eyed, resolute young face rose up distinctly before her. There was something in the recollection of it which seemed to give a bright, disdainful, smiling denial to the conclusion that all men were alike base and forgetful. And then in keen reaction came the frightened sense that it was her own husband she was judging. She sat quite still, striv-

ing to check her sobs, as if it were some other woman's pain which she was watching. It was only wise to give up expectation. It was enough if she could still keep some hold of habit, some affection born of common interest, upon his heart. She was not anxious for herself; she felt no personal dread of disloyalty; for her, life was too completely ended. But she dreaded some new movement of her husband's which should shatter at one blow past and present, and poison even memory with doubt. It was turning the sacredness of life into a hideous farce if he ceased to love her.

Hitherto she had been saved from that bitterness of soul which is the one irreparable curse of life,—the sin against the Holy Ghost within us. She waited now, until the warm air had dried the tears upon her cheeks, and then she arose slowly and walked towards the house. It seemed easier to meet her husband there, in the first impulse of this new rush of tenderness, than where every sound and sight served to remind her of her effort. In this hot weather, the old contessa's faded boudoir was still the coolest room in the house. They habitually sat there now in the evening. She looked up from force of habit as she drew back the curtain at the portrait of Lalli's mother on the wall. The two faces made a curious contrast,—one warm and living, all flushed and tremulous with tears, the other simpering agreeably through its dimmed paint, and gazing at a rose with rococo philosophy.

But, just then, Barbara felt that even a portrait might be a misrepresentation.

## CHAPTER XV.

WHEN her husband's carriage drew up at the door she did not hurry forward to meet him as had been her custom, not caring to expose herself to the curious eyes of the groom. And perhaps it was well that she hesitated, for the delay gave her time to catch sight of the face of a second arrival. She saw another man get down heavily from the *caretta*, and heard his voice making some casual remarks about the horses. It was the face and voice of Cavaliere Borgia.

She rose with an impulse of uncontrollable indignation, and walked half-way across the room; then stopped. Where was she going? She sat down again with her back to the door, so as to avoid having to look up as her husband entered.

He knew by her very attitude how she was disposed to resent the breaking of what had been a tacit understanding between them from the first; and even as he bent down to kiss her he had time to resolve that he would have no explanation on the subject. He knew that Barbara could be trusted not to make a public exhibition of her displeasure; and he was desirous of keeping quite clear of anything which would force him into asserting his mastery

unpleasantly. He had several requests to make of his wife.

"I have brought you a visitor, *Barbara mia*. You have not forgotten Marcantonio Borgia?" he said aloud.

It made very little difference to him that she turned pale and shrank away imperceptibly from his kiss. Life was spectacular to Cesco; and when he had seen the same play too often it bored him. It was his wife who bored him now. But, to do him justice, there was no indication whatever of this in his manner at the present juncture. When Barbara looked at him she was struck at once by what seemed on his part like a return to a former condition of things. His air, the tone of his voice, his dress even, had undergone modification. He looked younger, handsomer, more alert than she had seen him look for months past. There was a general trimness about his appearance which suggested the ex-Papal officer. He brushed a speck of dust carefully from off his white immaculate cuff; while Borgia was speaking he smiled agreeably; he watched his own reflection in the small tarnished square of looking-glass which ornamented the back of the chiffoniere at the farther end of the room.

While they were still standing in the boudoir, one of the servants who had accompanied his master to Rome entered the room rather hurriedly. He spoke to Cesco, —

"*Scusi*, Signor Conte. I pray for a thousand pardons; but the little parcel which the Signora Cardella put into the carriage —"

"That will do. It's all right; I have it," Cesco said, speaking impatiently. The groom disappeared, and Barbara turned to her husband with some slight gesture of surprise. "You did not tell me you had seen Regina. Is she in Rome? How is she?" she asked in her clear, candid voice. It was Borgia who answered.

"I met him there," looking over at Lalli. "I have known Cardella for years. He is *deputato* from my part of the country. They are just leaving Rome. I went there to pay my respects to the signora and the baby. She is well. She is beautiful, *diamine!* — more beautiful than ever!"

"Ah," said Barbara, just letting her eyes rest upon him for an instant, and then looking pointedly away. She felt confirmed in her old impression that some unavowed sentiment existed between this man and her husband's cousin, and there was something peculiarly distasteful to her in knowing any details of his private life. It seemed hard enough that she should be called upon in any way to recognize his existence.

But she said nothing of this to her husband when they were alone together before dinner. She felt that worst, most paralyzing fear of all, — the dread lest she might furnish him with the opportunity of doing or saying something past forgiveness. So that when he remarked, "I am afraid you do not like having Borgia in the house. But the fact is, I needed him. He is useful to me — about business," she only said quietly, "I am glad if he can be of any assist-



ance to you." She had long ago given up expecting that Cesco's past protestations could be any indications of what he meant to do now.

"You know we have always been great friends," Lalli added more insistingly. And then, as his wife continued to be silent, he strolled over to where she was standing by the window, and half put his arm about her waist. "He is very easily offended — Borgia. And I particularly wish him kept in a good humor just now. He is — useful to me."

She still made no answer, and his brow darkened perceptibly. The lines about his mouth began to harden. It required a distinct effort on his part to say in a conciliatory voice, "I remember our discussing this very point one day before our marriage. You said then that you had no wish to come between me and my old companions. But perhaps you have forgotten."

She could have shown him the very spot in which the words he quoted had been spoken. But now she contented herself with answering, "I will do all I can to make Cavaliere Borgia comfortable, and his visit here — pleasant. Since you wish it." And after a moment she added, "Is he likely to stay long?"

"Oh, I don't know," said Lalli carelessly, letting his arm fall, and thrusting his hands into his pockets. "A day, two days, three days; I did not ask him for any particular length of time."

Presently he added, with determined carelessness, "By the way, I saw your father in town. He has

returned from Siena. And I had some conversation with him."

"Dear papa! How is he? How is he looking?" Barbara asked, turning away from the window, and walking back into the room.

"Oh, he is well enough; you need not concern yourself about that. He is quite well enough to look after his own comfort," Lalli said in a tone of biting irony. He was evidently referring to something which had taken place. But he offered no further explanation. He had his reasons for not continuing the subject.

After dinner the two men sat down to cards in the little boudoir. All through dinner Barbara had been aware of the increasing likeness of manner between Borgia and her husband. It seemed as if the very points of character which the cavaliere had selected to copy were becoming dominant in Lalli's nature. And now, as they sat together with the light of the candles upon their faces, she even fancied that she could detect a certain similarity of expression between them.

It was a hot, still night. For a long while the only sound in the room was an occasional brief word from one of the players. At last Borgia looked up with a petulant exclamation.

"*Perdio!* this is too much! It is luck in cards and love as well!" he said angrily, standing up and pouring himself out another glass of wine. And then, turning with rather a foolish laugh to Barbara, "The signora contessa must excuse me. It is only natural to envy Cesco."

"Ah!" said Lalli, smiling imperceptibly, and shuffling together the cards.

"But I fear for you the draught from this open window. The season of fever approaches. If you would but allow me to close —"

"Thank you. I am just going away," said Barbara, rising immediately.

She passed out into the hall; the windows were all closed and barred. She hesitated a moment and then turned and opened the door of the disused drawing-room. At the farther end a glass door opened out upon a small iron balcony and a narrow flight of stairs leading into the garden. Barbara stepped out upon the balcony.

Her first sensation was one of extreme relief. It was enough for a time to stand here motionless, feeling the wind blow in her face, and looking out at the clear, serene darkness of the summer night. But presently the desire for change, — any change, — which had brought her here, grew stronger. She caught up a light wrap which was lying on the back of a chair and twisted it about her neck, and passed down the narrow iron staircase. She moved forward a few steps uncertainly. She entered the little plantation of young beech-trees which encircled the house. The wind struck the branches softly against each other; there was no rustle of leaves, only the light tapping of the wood grown dry with the great heat. It was a very still night. The very brook seemed hushed; swollen at this point by the intersection of another watercourse, it glided past, dark, wide, silent; only

by the moister air, by the odor of wild mint, by the bitter smell of the water-plants crushed beneath her feet, could she know of its nearness. At the far edge of the wood the trees grew smaller. She came out upon the open fields. Close at her feet, the tall wheat bent and rustled; farther yet the low rounded hills lay bare beneath the clear darkness of the night. The wind was cool; she passed her hands over her face, and the freshness of her skin felt unfamiliar. It was like touching some other person.

She sat down at the foot of a tree by the edge of the thicket, and little by little her ear grew accustomed to the apparent stillness, as her eye had grown accustomed to the dark. She began to detect very faint far-off sounds, the thin bark of a dog in some distant farm-yard, the plaintive cry of some wild creature from the hills, and all manner of small creepings and stirrings in the wood and in the wheat.

In this part of the Campagna, where the land is fertile, it is possible to ride for miles without passing a sign of human habitation. Here are no shepherds; in time of harvest, troops of laborers descend from the mountain villages. The fields belong, for the most part, to the great landed proprietors, to the Borghese, the Torlonias, the Pallavicini, and are let by them to various *mercanti di campagna* living in Rome. It is a peaceful, lonely country. At other points—in the great breeding farms, for instance—there are watchmen riding about all through the night, silent muffled figures, riding in pairs, armed with long shining carbines, mounted on strong, un-

kempt horses ; men scant of speech and suspicious of danger. But here, after nightfall, there is never a step or voice to break the vast tranquillity of the fields.

The melancholy, puissant charm of the summer night had fallen upon Barbara ; her soul was tranquillized, her spirit liberated. Thought surrendered to emotion ; her life, too, became absorbed, a part of all that hushed, expectant nature ; expectant, for, as she turned again towards the house, the late moon was rising above a gap in the low rounded hills, rising divinely flushed and fair, as Diana may have looked in some far-off night upon the grassy top of Latmos. And now the solitude had found its voice, and far and near the short plaintive cry of the civetta owls called and answered across the lonely meadows.

Barbara had not the courage to return to the house ; she wandered to and fro in the garden, among the leafy bushes of syringa. One by one she saw the lights going out in the windows ; at last there was only one lamp left burning, in the room where Borgia and her husband were still sitting over their cards.

When she did enter Lalli glanced up sharply as if about to speak ; then his face changed. He looked at his wife, but said nothing. The room was full of the smoke of cigars ; the windows were closed, the candles had burned down almost to their sockets.

"I began to fear that the signora contessa had deserted us entirely," said Borgia, smiling agreeably and looking up from his game.

"You abandoned us early, my dear," Lalli added curtly. He had never spoken to her with so little pretence of affection in his tone before. Barbara was startled.

"I did not mean to be long away. I was walking; and it is cooler in the garden," she said gently, looking anxiously at her husband. She sat down near him. Presently a card fell from the table; she stooped to pick it up, and as she gave it to him their hands met, but he kept his eyes resolutely turned aside. The days were distant indeed when such an accidental contact would have had power to waken all the tenderness of his nature,—those early days, when life in common was nothing less than a succession of endearing experiences, falling with the unheeded loveliness of the early shadows in a wood.

She sat quite silent for several moments, watching the motion of his strong, determined-looking hands. He had a new ring on one of his fingers she noticed. Borgia turned his bright dark eyes inquiringly towards her once or twice, but no one spoke.

She began to realize that she had never known what utter helplessness was like before.

## CHAPTER XVI.

**B**UT that first feeling had time to pass away ; she had even to a certain degree become reconciled to Borgia's presence perpetually between them, before Lalli in any way confirmed her dread of some new painful experience in store for her.

One hot morning she had left both the men busy over letters which they had received and were answering, and had carried a book and some embroidery-work to a seat a little off the road and up the hill in front of the house. It was a bit of steep and stony bank which she had chosen. The deep intervals between the fallen rocks were filled with a tangle of blackberry vines ; wild strawberry leaves stained blood-red or yellow freckled with brown, grew closely together in all the cracks and crannies of the great gray boulders ; and against the sky, crowning the ridge of the solitary rock beneath whose shadow she was sitting, a fringe of golden-rod and aster stood boldly up in the sun. She had not been there for many minutes before her husband joined her. He was smoking as he came slowly up the road, with his hands in his pockets.

It was a part of Cesco Lalli's accepted philosophy that married life must sooner or later become, as some

one has said, a question of "Shall we engage a butler, or will the parlor-maid do?" But it has been found, curiously enough, that the material difficulties of life are scarcely to be simplified by the rejection of an ideal. It annoyed him unspeakably now to be forced into this practical interview with his wife. Still he spoke kindly.

"This is like old times, Barbara."

He threw away the end of his cigar, and sat down on the grass beside her. She was working. "You are always doing something," he said, bending his head to look at the embroidery.

She lifted her face suddenly, and their eyes were nearly on a level. "*Già*, you are always doing something with those pretty white hands of yours," he repeated, smiling reassuringly.

Then, after a moment's silence, "But even to be always busy does not imply good luck. *Dà la verita* (tell the truth), it is so, is it not, Barbara?"

"Yes," said Barbara, wondering.

He glanced at her, still keeping the end of her work between his fingers. "As for me, I am sick of this life of continued annoyance (*sono stuffo di questi inganni eterni*). I have just had another most unpleasant experience. A man to whom I had advanced money on a promissory note — but never mind the details; you would not understand them. It is enough for you to know that I absolutely require that you should help me."

He sat up, and the bit of silk dropped from his hand. "It is your father who ought to help us now," he said, in a complaining tone.



Barbara sat perfectly still for a minute or two, keeping her eyes fixed upon the nearest rock. "Have you asked papa for money yet?" she asked in a very low voice.

"No — yes. I did not suggest it as a favor to myself. I said that you were coming to speak to him about recovering your mother's dowry. It is only just. It is what any one else would have insisted upon long ago," said Lalli slowly.

Each sentence was spoken with increasing intensity. He expected an outbreak of passionate remonstrance. But she only said, after an interval of silence, —

"I suppose that you have not forgotten under what conditions my father must claim the money? And when we married you said that you would prefer not to take it. And I should like papa to have been spared pain if possible. He —" She put her hand quickly up to her lips, which began to tremble. "I think it hard that he should be made to suffer in consequence of — us. He was not desirous of our marriage."

"He was not," Lalli assented sullenly, looking away at the blank road.

"And — indeed, Cesco, you said you would not do it," said Barbara, rising too and laying her hand pleadingly upon his arm.

He moved his eyes uneasily from side to side, looking past her.

"I said it — I said it! Well, yes, I did say it. And much good it did me! As if it made any difference what a man said! I would have said anything — then."

"Ah —" murmured Barbara.

The very force of her scorn reacted upon her like a stimulant. She bent down and picked up the book which had fallen to the ground, and brushed off some particles of moss adhering to its covers. "Shall you wish me to go to town at once? or will it do if I wait until we move to Rome next week? I should prefer not to write to my father unless you especially desire it."

"Oh, wait till next week," said Lalli quickly. "It is really very good of you not to make more objection. But, of course, when you come to think the matter over quietly — And you will see that, as I have already suggested to him, it is far more natural that the request should come from you. But it is quite the same thing."

"Oh — quite," said Barbara, feeling as if there was nothing left in the world worthy of an explanation. And even in this case did not she and her husband unite in the doing? How could any further action be feasible which should not express them both? Even at that moment she felt the impossibility of disavowing his purposes to her father, for what blame was possible which should not reflect backwards? And it had been her own desire to marry him.

"Then that is all right. *Benone*," said Cesco cheerfully, drawing himself up and spreading out his hands. The look of anxiety fell away from his face. A smile came into his eyes, he began whistling softly in an undertone.

"I see them bringing out my horse. I told Gian-

battista he would find me here. I am going over to the lower farm," he remarked presently, breaking off in the middle of his tune. He looked at his wife. "You were reading, were you not? What is it? Anything interesting?"

"Oh, it is English. You would not understand it," said Barbara, still with the same careful precision of manner. She felt as if all impulses of relenting tenderness were crushed forever.

"Well — good-by for the present!" said Lalli, looking at her and then slightly shrugging his shoulders. He had meant to tell her some news he had heard about friends of her own as a sort of reward for her obedience, but now he could see no particular reason for caring to give her pleasure.

He turned away, and went whistling down the hillside, jumping from rock to rock. She heard his loud, animated voice speaking to the groom and then to his horse, and presently he cantered past on the road, with his dog circling and barking at the horse's heels. There was a tendency to massiveness in Lalli's physique which made him always appear to greatest advantage when seen in the open air and engaged in active exercise. Well mounted, one could have imagined him riding out of one of Dumas' novels. There was promise of adventure in his aspect. As he turned out of the highroad now into a leafy lane overrun with eglantine and honeysuckle in flower, he checked his horse to gather a wild rose from the hedgerow. He adjusted it carefully in the button-hole of his riding-coat. He smiled to himself as he

did so, humming the while some words of an old operatic song. He had begun of late to find life interesting. He cut at all the hanging branches with the end of his whip as he rode along. It amused him to see his horse start and swerve at the sound. The financial calculations which crossed his mind from time to time had acquired a sudden new cheerfulness. He felt almost sorry now that he had not told his wife about meeting Hardinge. After all she might have been much more disagreeable about speaking to her father — confound him! And, after all, the important point was gained when she consented to do what he chose. For, with all his own characteristic looseness of relation between statement and fact, Lalli had gradually acquired an absolute confidence in Barbara's word. And it was, he reflected, a comfortable quality to have secured — in one's wife. On the whole, he was not particularly dissatisfied with his marriage.

Barbara had remained for some time where he left her. She had resolutely taken up her book; it was a volume of Darwin's "Origin of Species," which was comparatively new then, and which Hardinge had lent her. She had put it aside for a long time, finding it difficult reading; but now, under the stimulating rush of indignation, it was astonishing how easily her mind moved, receiving new facts with a prompt, flexible intelligence, which seemed like something apart from her usual self, some separate force.

She read persistently until her watch warned her it was nearly time for luncheon. She walked back

to the house with the same feeling of defying emotion, going to her room and ringing for her maid to help her change her dress.

"But the signora contessa's gown is still perfectly fresh. It only came from the washerwoman this morning," the maid remarked in some astonishment. She was not accustomed to these sudden whims on the part of her mistress.

"Oh, get me something I have never worn before. Give me the new white dress," said Barbara, sitting down before the glass and beginning to arrange her hair. She wanted everything to be different.

"*Per ubbidirla, signora,*" said Nanna, reflecting rapidly that it was true the Cavaliere Borgia was staying in the house, and had not Tomaso, the groom, brought back some queer stories about the way the master went on in Rome? *Madonna mia*, but it was a shame! little Nanna thought sympathetically, kneeling down to adjust the train of the new dress. And if that was the way 'Maso expected to go on after their own marriage —

"The signora should always wear white. The signora contessa looks like an angel in white. And with that pink color on her cheeks," she said aloud. *Dio buono!* but it was dull out there in the country! It was small wonder if the signora wanted a little amusement.

It is possible that this was also the Cavaliere Borgia's opinion. He had asked permission, after luncheon, to smoke a cigarette beside her, in the garden. It was a large, old-fashioned garden, laid out *à l'An-*

*glaise*, with clipped yew-trees, and much gravel walk and stone seats half buried now under the untrimmed thickets of syringa. At the farther end from the house stood a group of old black cypresses. The ground was bare of everything but moss beneath their shadow. There was a bench here, on which Barbara sat down; on the opposite side of the walk were two stone animals, sphinxes or lions, it was difficult to speak decisively.

Barbara sat down here.

"It is hot. When it is hot, one finds it fatiguing to walk far. You are tired, contessa, *non è vero?*" the Cavaliere Borgia observed.

He was in the habit of making statements of this nature. Before Lalli's marriage, he had indulged in much admiration for this fair-haired girl; he thought her "lively and full of judgment" (*vivace e piena di giudizio*), and it had struck him as unaccountable, under the circumstances, that she should fail to feel some similar attraction towards himself. Later on, he had attributed this inattention to the fact of her being in love with Cesco; but now, and especially after seeing more of Cesco, it seemed not improbable that her mind would be more open to the claims of unobtrusive merit.

Meanwhile he proposed to try an experiment. After one or two remarks about the heat—a thunder-storm was coming up—he said suddenly, "For we Romans, of course, it makes less difference. And we count you as one of ourselves now, signora. *Una vera Romana*, you are a true Roman. But I was

surprised to meet other friends of yours in town at this hot season."

"Ah," said Barbara listlessly, "Miss Maclean does not like the trouble of travelling. They often stay all the summer long."

Borgia looked puzzled.

"Miss Maclean? That is the old lady with the sister? But I speak not of her. I speak of that young man — he whose friend was lame — who was a friend of your father."

"Mr. Hardinge! Do you mean Mr. Hardinge?" she asked, with a sudden change of tone. Her eyes brightened.

"Mr. Hardinge. *Sicuro* — Mr. Hardinge. We met him at the café. He is staying at the Hotel d'Angleterre. He has been travelling. He has been staying at Sorrento with the Signora Damon. He is at the Hotel d'Angleterre, waiting for a friend to join him," said Borgia slowly. He sat down on the bench — hitherto he had been standing — and looked steadily at her. "Is it possible that Cesco did not speak of this?" he asked.

"No," said Barbara, the color deepening a little on her cheeks. She added quickly, "Probably he forgot it." Speaking the words seemed to give them reality.

Borgia shrugged his shoulders heavily. "You think that probable?" He hesitated for an instant; he looked up. Barbara's eyes were turned away from him, her hands were lightly clasped together on her lap. The sudden illumination passing away from

her face marked more clearly than usual the difference which this last year had wrought in her expression. And after all Borgia was something more than merely a thick-shouldered and rather stupid young man. There were kindly instincts to be awakened in him; he was, for instance, an excellent and devoted son. He was moved now by a real impulse of compassion.

"It is — yes, *perdio*! — it is too much to ask of a man that he should stand by calmly and see you treated in this fashion!"

"Signor Borgia?" said Barbara, looking up with incredulous wonder. It was a new experience to her that any outsider should have presumed to make her life a subject for private speculation.

"What does it matter?" asked Borgia, standing up and crossing his arms. (She had often seen Cesco assume that attitude.) "You would not listen to me; I know it. If I were to say to you that I care for nothing in life but being of some use to you, what would it matter? I have always cared for you, and you knew it when you chose to marry Cesco. You must have known it. Why, it was I who spoke to Cesco first about you. I had told him all about you the day you met — at the Quirinal Ball. It was I who had followed you everywhere for weeks; who knew all your movements. Cesco had never heard about you, except from me, before that day. And then you chose *him*."

"It is not true!" said Barbara passionately, standing up and looking at him from under her eyelids



with a scornful slightness, as if she could hardly admit the fact that he was indeed there.

It was enough to turn compassion into a smarting desire to make her feel his presence at any cost. Borgia's eyes sparkled. "You don't believe me, then? Ask Lalli," he said, with significant concision.

"Ah!" said Barbara, sitting down again and letting her hand fall heavily against the stone of the bench. She felt sick at heart.

"How was I to suppose that you did not know of it? You were easily deceived!" said Borgia, still speaking with much bitterness.

She did not move, and, after a moment's silence, he added in a softened tone, "But I did not mean to hurt you. You have enough to trouble you without that. Only how was I to know that you still cared for him?"

Barbara did not answer.

"I must go now, I suppose. I shall leave a note for Cesco, to say that I was called away on business. I ask you for nothing; but whatever happens, you know that you can depend on me—to the death," he added. His voice trembled; he was much moved by the sound of his own words. "Good-by,—Barbara!"

He looked at her hand, but his courage failed him. He did not dare to touch it. "I am going. 'T is not your fault. 'T is fatality. I am going; good-by!" he repeated. He added, "I shall write to you from Rome."

"Good-by," she said automatically.

The very words he used — Cesco's old phraseology — fell like a chill paralysis upon the faith she had been struggling to keep alive. At that moment the past grew empty and ironical as the placid stone visage of some broken idol. She leaned her head back against the rough trunk of the tree behind her, feeling faint. She heard Borgia's slow heavy footsteps crunching on the gravelled walk, and she knew that he was gone; but his absence made little difference. What she had heard about Cesco had burnt out all meaning from his other words.

"Not even then — he was not loyal even then," she said to herself over and over again. For the first time since her marriage she gave her fear an articulate utterance. And to have thrown away her life — all its possibilities — for this!

She did not weep. She sat looking with a sort of stupefied wonder at the grotesque forms of the moss-stained sphinxes across the path. It was the first time in her existence that Barbara had known — had recognized — the inexorable clutch of experience. In all which had gone before, in her girl-visions of life, in her pleasures, in her love for Lalli even, she had been conscious of personal effort — of a willing effort — but yet conscious that she herself had somewhat to do with the result obtained. But now — she faced the inevitable. Here was knowledge of sorrow that was hereafter and always to be a part of her. It was not even a question how she might submit to it. The privation was absolute.

A few drops of rain fell slowly on her hands and on her white dress. She rose, with the feeling that it was incumbent upon her to do nothing to provoke remark, and went back into the house. The afternoon had almost passed away as she sat meditating. It was growing dusk now inside the great hall. She passed into her boudoir. The storm was coming up rapidly; the thunder broke in a long clattering peal overhead; there was a banging of window-shutters, and a hurrying of footsteps; presently she heard her husband's step on the stair. He had ridden his horse around to the stable and come in by a back door.

"What is all this infernal nonsense of Borgia's? — Look at my luck! look at what I have escaped, will you?" he said, coming in with his hat still on his head and an open letter in his hand. He pointed with his whip at the blinding sheet of rain. "A deluge — and just a day before the corn wants cutting! It is the devil's own invention! — But what is all this about Borgia? What made him go? He said this morning he should stay until to-morrow."

He threw his hat down on the table and stood looking at Barbara.

"I did not ask him to go. It was his own proposition," she said after a silence.

"It is very curious then," said Lalli dryly, tapping the table with his whip and continuing to look at her. "Very curious indeed."

She rose, moved by some uncontrollable emotion. She walked over to the window and looked out.

With her eyes fixed upon the white driving sheets of rain, it seemed easier to ask certain questions.

"Cesco —"

"Well?"

"Do you remember — before we were married — you wrote me that letter — I have always wanted to ask you about it —"

"Well?" asked Lalli again, seeing that she paused. He threw himself down on the sofa and took out a cigarette, and began feeling for his match-box.

"I wanted to ask you — about that duel with Cavaliere Borgia," said Barbara resolutely.

The wild gust of wind and rain which beat against the window seemed to shut them in more completely alone. She crossed the room and went and stood before her husband. "About that duel. Do you remember —?"

"Oh yes, I remember," said Lalli calmly, turning his dark eyes towards her without moving.

"Tell me!" said Barbara beseechingly, kneeling down suddenly beside him and putting her hand on his arm. He contemplated her for an instant in silence. "It was — it was true, was it not?" she asked in a very low voice, laying her cheek down against his hand.

Lalli smiled imperceptibly.

"My dear Barbara, as if you needed to be told that all is fair in love and war! And I was very much in love with you in those days, my dear." He smiled and brushed back his mustache. "I assure you I remember the morning perfectly."

"Then you did not mean it," said Barbara slowly.

She rose and seated herself by the table. She turned her face away from him and looked at the smiling portrait of the old Contessa Lalli; it was the lightest object in the room. "Then it is true — I am right in supposing — that what I imagined to be a — a crisis for you was only a farce? You wrote me that story about the duel because you knew that was the way to make me come?"

"I knew that was the way to make you come, certainly," said Lalli complacently. "But it was quite true that I had challenged Borgia on your account. Poor Borgia! I was really in the devil of a temper that day! I dare say I should have shot him if we had gone out together. I don't know," he said musingly, throwing his arm back over the head of the sofa, and knocking off the ash of his cigarette. "Perhaps we should have shaken hands over it in any case — even if you had been stony-hearted enough to resist my appeal. We have both been out often enough not to need to give a proof of courage under fire. And then, being old friends made it easier to arrange. *Fra amici*. It is possible to come to an understanding between friends."

He looked over at his wife inquiringly.

"You never asked me about this before, *cara mia*. What is the matter? What has made you so curious? Has Marcantonio been reminding you of old times?"

He stood up and rubbed his hand carelessly over his hair.

"I don't suppose that you expect me to feel disappointed that I did not let myself be shot at *pour tes beaux yeux*, eh, Barbara?"

"I? I expect nothing," said Barbara in her clearest voice.

At that moment she stepped aside morally, judging her husband as if he belonged to another world from her own. In the bitterness of that isolation there did not seem to be left even so much as a memory in common. And it had always been so from the first. She had always been mistaken. There seemed nothing left in the world worthy of love; life had grown hateful.

Once, travelling in the Italian Tyrol with her father, they had spent the greater part of a summer day driving beside the barren, rock-strewn expanse which at times was the bed of a stream. She remembered the arid, iron-bound look of those mountains; in another way it seemed to her that she was seeing it all over again. And was it altogether Cesco's fault that she had never understood a Southern nature? Had he ever pretended to be otherwise than he was? She thought of that Italian stream; and the full pouring, surging tide of his passion, — breaking resistance and overwhelming retreat, — where was it now? There was left to her a bare and sun-scorched wilderness in the extremity of summer.

## CHAPTER XVII.

"AN Englishman of normal health and spirits never compares himself to any one else. At the utmost — when he is ill, or after half a lifetime of foreign travel — he compares other nations to his own," observed Mr. Clifford Dix sententiously. "I don't mean," he added after a pause, "that the remark applies particularly to Lexeter."

"No," said Hardinge lazily, clasping both hands together under his head and staring up at the sky; "certainly not; not to Lexeter."

"When do you expect him here?"

"Oh — any time to-morrow. I am not in a hurry. I don't mind waiting when I have everything else I want," looking away at a distant line of stone pines. What darkness against limpid light those broad-roofed pines lifted against the sky! He gazed at them for several moments in silence. "Why should one ever leave Rome? Rome in summer."

"Fever," said Dix, yawning.

"Hang the fever! You had much better make up your mind to stay. Stay and travel up to Venice with us when Lexeter is ready to go on. I think of stopping several days in Venice."

"Can't. I have promised to meet some people in Florence; cousins of mine. One of them is very

pretty, — the same sort of type as little Miss Damon. By the way, what has become of the Damons? You saw them, did n't you, at Sorrento?"

"They are very well. They are just as usual," said Hardinge, smiling confidentially at his row of pines. He looked up at the sky again. "You had far better join us and throw over your cousins."

"One of them, the elder one, has never been out of America before. She is a wonderful specimen of the New England type, — one of those New England women who lack a little wholesome sin to make them efficiently human. She is like some one whose only conception of fire is sitting over a hot-air register."

"Oh," said Hardinge, "I did not understand. Of course, if you are looking forward to a new intellectual experience — That settles it. I dare say we shall all be grateful when your next novel comes out."

"Ah," said Dix. "But speaking of new experiences, I saw that Italian fellow the other day — Lelli — — Lalli; the man who married Miss Floyd. What has become of her? Nice girl that. I should like meeting her again. I fancy she was just the sort of girl who would come out tremendously strong after her marriage." He added, after a pause, "I always fancied that Lexeter was rather hit in that quarter, do you know?"

"Lexeter!"

"Well, I don't pretend to be infallible."

"They are coming up to town this week. I met Lalli the other day at a café, and he told me so. I



half offered to ride over to call on his wife, but he said they were coming up."

"That sounds promising for Lexeter," said Dix, yawning again and looking at his watch. "Odd thing, though, that it should always be one's friend's wife who teaches one to fall in love with virtue!—Nearly seven, by Jove! and there is still all that confounded packing to look after. Well, good-by, old fellow. I shall see you again somewhere, I suppose?"

"I will walk down to the gate with you," said Hardinge, putting on his hat.

They had been lounging away the greater part of the afternoon in the Villa Albani. Hardinge's permit was for an off-day. The Villa was empty save for the presence of the custodian, his workmen, and his family. And what a place it was, and what an afternoon! Outside these walls Rome lay like a thing dead, sunstruck and silent. But here was leafy coolness; here were statues, busts, fountains, vases, black cypresses, motionless ilex groves, and formal walks of box, and bright parterres of flowers surrounding columned pavilions from whose walls Greek masks look out with tragic glare or grin in comic horror. Here are bas-reliefs by Pheidias and Polyclete; here is the famous bas-relief of Antinous holding the lotus-flower, his beautiful brows knitted with pain. But even this is not the supreme thing in the Villa Albani.

The supreme thing is the Greek marble bas-relief of Orpheus and Eurydice. Hardinge stood looking at

it for a long time. He often came to see it, this simple, grave, sweet thing, witness of a lost art of naturalness, of propriety of gesture, of harmonious lines and beautifully filled spaces; a work in which line and mass are more than detail, in which everything is just in emphasis and large in impression, and apart from imitative or realistic art.

The summer afternoon seemed made for looking at this warm-tinted, soft-textured Pentelican marble. He found himself in a world of graceful, harmonious, and beautiful things, images from a past life and an old worship,—the worship of beauty and the life of nature; a plastic world, which bears no trace of Christian or mediæval or modern sentiment; a summer world, fresh with the sound of water falling under leaves.

And for one moment imagine yourself in his place. Look at delightful fauns piping or dancing, at leering satyrs, at reeling Silenus; look at sleepy, languid, white-armed Bacchus; at well-knit Mercury; see the nymphs, the bacchantes, the mænades, and the marble Venus herself, and confess if this is not to feel like an exile? to look with alien eyes upon these shapes from the old world of smiling existences,—a world to admire, a world that has something in it to release one from the stress and torment of business and religion? Aliens and exiles that we are, how close can we get to Greek ideals? Baffled, as before something different to us, remote from us, we gaze and use our critical sense, employ our understanding, and do not surrender to emotion. We miss, before the very

images of supremest Greek life and beauty, the blithe, free, open spirit of pure and conscienceless and elemental enjoyment to which they best appeal, — from which they were born.

We look, as Hardinge did that night, past statue and bust and column, past cypress grove and avenue of ilex, to the wide Campagna, now warm-colored and glowing with ripened miles of grass and grain; we look at Monte Generano, pale and ghost-like; we look at the faint and waving line of the Alban hills; we see the rising August moon in spaces of filmy cloud, the sighing pines, the masses of oleander letting fall their flakes of blossoming fire. And then, and only then, do we surrender to emotion; sadness and charm possess us; for nature is greater, closer, more potent than art to the modern man.

The sky grew darker; there was a rolling mass of thunder-cloud heaped up at the horizon in the direction of Bracciano. It was the storm that we know of, breaking among the hills. But the evening was cloudless at Rome. While Barbara was standing by the window, Hardinge was idly watching the same storm, and from a distance. His thoughts went back to Sorrento. Presently he rose and strolled down the path with his hands in his pockets. His way led him past the blossoming oleanders. The flower reminded him of Octave; the last time he had seen her she had worn one in her dress. He stood still, looking down at the soft rosy clusters; their exquisite flush of color was like a message, a confession. He put out his hand and drew one of the branches gently towards him.

He would not pluck one, — no ! he would not pluck one for the world. He sat down on the edge of a marble sarcophagus and looked over at the flowers. The vision-like beauty of the evening, the perfume of the oleanders, the solitude, were all a part of an exquisite explanation. He understood now why he had returned to Italy.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

IT was not until the following week that the Lallis arrived in town. Hardinge never forgot those intervening days. He spent them chiefly alone, in cool deserted galleries, in churches, or stretched out at full length in the shade under the pines of some villa. And wherever he went he carried his new secret with him. It followed him through the empty and echoing corridors of the Vatican; he felt it in the warm touch of the wind, he heard it in the cool, dripping, splashing sound of the fountains. Once, in the course of that week, he wrote to Mrs. Damon, inquiring about their plans. What was their next move to be? It was quite possible that he might have the pleasure of joining them again before long. He sent no especial message to Octave. He waited — he was hardly impatient — for her mother's answer. He was existing in a charmed space of life; any action, even the most ardently desired, would be interruption.

But this feeling did not prevent his calling upon Barbara. It was the day after her arrival, and as he entered the old familiar *portone* of the Palazzo Vecchio, and ran lightly up the broad dark steps, it seemed difficult to realize much of change in her surroundings. It was Margherita who opened the door to him,

with a "*Bentornato, signorino!*" which made her black eyes flash again with welcome. Was the Signora Lalli at home? Ah, that she was, thanks to the blessed Madonna, and a rare sight it was to see the dear young lady in her own place again. She had nothing to say against the signor conte, not she; a handsome young gentleman, if there ever was one, and a tongue to coax the birds down off the trees when he was so minded, but — *Via!* she was a stupid old woman; she was keeping the signorino waiting in the passage; and what with the luggage the Signor Floyd was taking with him, and the signora's own boxes not yet half unpacked —

"Is Mr. Floyd going away?" Hardinge asked with some surprise, glancing at the pile of packing-cases.

"He goes — *Santissima vergine!* but he goes to America," said Margherita, throwing open the drawing-room door. She looked in: "With permission. A visitor for the signora contessa!"

Barbara was seated at the writing-table near the window, her cheek resting on her hand. She looked up abruptly at the sound of Margherita's announcement, half turning around in her chair; and then, as her eyes fell upon Hardinge, the whole expression of her countenance altered. Something like a wave of reflected sunlight passed suddenly over her face. She held out her hand: "Ah, how good of you to come so soon! I am so glad to see you again."

"I should have come still sooner. I should have come yesterday, but I thought you would be tired. I thought you would not want me. And I fear I am

interrupting you as it is," said Hardinge, shaking hands with her and glancing at the writing-table.

"How was I to know that it was you? I thought it was some tiresome caller," said Barbara playfully.

She drew away her hand and pointed to a chair. "You shall have your old seat." She sat down herself with her back to the light. "I am really so very glad to see you again," she said simply.

Hardinge looked at her. Her eyelids were a little red as if she had been crying not long before, and the smile of pure gladness which was playing about her lips gave her something of the look of an unhappy child at school receiving an unexpected visit.

Hardinge looked at her with a sudden accession of interest. There had always lingered in his mind some touch of association, some remembrance of the walk they had taken together, which gave him a peculiar sentiment about what concerned Barbara. He was at all times especially tender and chivalrous in his thoughts about women, but in this instance the feeling was even stronger. He would have liked to take both her hands in his to try to comfort her. In default of anything more satisfactory to say, he contented himself with asking after her husband.

"Count Lalli is very well, thank you. He will be sorry not to see you. He has gone to the bank to see about some business with my father; otherwise they would not be out in this heat." She looked down at her hands lying on her lap. "I think, probably, he will be going to Venice before long."

"Who will be going to Venice? Your father?"

"No. I mean Cesco."

"Ah, I am going there myself before very long. Perhaps I may see him," said Hardinge, moving slightly and throwing his arm over the back of the chair. He was privately determined to do nothing of the kind.

"Why, everybody is going away. Papa is going," said Barbara, speaking rather sadly.

"Yes; Margherita told me so. She said that Mr. Floyd was going to America. Don't you long to go with him? I mean — you will find it rather lonely here, I am afraid. Particularly while Count Lalli is in Venice," added Hardinge sympathetically, turning his eyes away lest it should embarrass her to feel that she was being looked at.

The color deepened perceptibly along her cheek and throat. She turned her face aside and looked at the ray of light stealing in through the shutters.

"I suppose it will be rather lonely," she began; and then something hot seemed to gather in her eyes and blind her. She could only sit quite still, hoping that Hardinge would notice nothing. Do not blame her for it; it was the first time for so many months that any one had been solicitous for her. The words that he used were commonplace enough; but there was no mistaking the feeling of friendliness and liking which prompted them. And Barbara was being taught that value of the safe and common good of life which is the mark, perhaps the compensation, of suffering. And sorrow would be intolerable but that it brings wisdom and deepens love. She had never felt more



passionately the need of devoting her life in service to something admirable and worthy. The mood of intolerable despair of all things good which had fallen upon her after listening to Borgia's revelations in the garden was, after all, only a mood. It was impossible, with a girl of Barbara's temperament, that the longing, clinging desire for something to love should not in the end subdue all merely personal considerations. Lalli was not what she had imagined him to be. He had never been what she imagined him to be; the knowledge was a part of her daily being, but surely that made only one more reason for striving ardently to fill up all the blank between them with more and more of self-devoting faith? But it was a relief to see some one with whom no effort was needed. She looked at Hardinge with a sense of absolute confidence.

"You will forgive my being so — so stupid. But things have gone wrong. I am troubled about papa's going. And things have a way of being troublesome at times," she said, with a half smile.

"I know," said Hardinge quietly. It was impossible to say more than he expressed by the tone of that simple assurance.

He got up from his chair and wandered restlessly about the room, fingering Mr. Floyd's old china and stuff.

"How are you off for new books?" he asked presently, stopping before the bookcase.

"I have several things to lend you," — he turned and looked towards her, — "things that you will find easier than Darwin."

"Oh, I have finished that now," said Barbara, looking up with an answering smile. There was a contagious sense of contentment about Hardinge; she felt happier than she had done for a long time.

"Lexeter is bringing me out a lot of new books from England. Curious idea, his coming down to Rome in August, is it not? But he could not get away this year at any other season."

"I am glad he is coming. Only I wish that it was not necessary that you should go away so soon!" said Barbara, looking at him frankly.

"Oh, I am not gone yet," said Hardinge hastily, standing up and passing his hand over his hair. He added, "I think you must let me stay for a while, and see if I can be of any use to you. Perhaps I might be of some service to look after your luggage and all that when you go to Venice to rejoin Count Lalli? And when Lexeter comes we must see if we cannot get up some more of our old riding parties. I dare say it would not be too hot after six o'clock. And there must be people left in town whom one knows."

"Don't try to make things too pleasant. Remember, I have been living in the country. I am not used to such dissipation," said Barbara playfully.

"It is all the better for you then. Such very good people are all the better for being spoiled," said Hardinge, taking up his hat to go. As he opened the door he caught sight of the packing-cases outside. "I want to see Mr. Floyd so much before he leaves. I want him to call on my mother if he stays any time

in New York. I wish you would ask me to come back to dinner?" he said, laughing.

"I hear papa coming in. He shall ask you himself," said Barbara, leaning back contentedly in her chair. It was like a change in the weather to have Hardinge's bright presence in the house.

When he went away that evening Cescio Lalli was the first person to make any comment upon him.

"I am beginning to like young Hardinge, rather. He amuses me. I used to think him conceited." He walked over to the empty fireplace. "It is a pity he is such a little fellow; he would n't be bad looking otherwise," he said, squaring his own broad shoulders and looking at himself complacently in the glass.

Barbara had seated herself at the writing-table.

"I am going to write to Octave Damon. Mr. Hardinge says the Damons are still at Sorrento. I am going to ask Octave to come and stay with me for a few days, if it makes no difference to you, Cescio?"

"What difference should it make?" asked Cescio, shrugging his shoulders slightly.

He fixed his dark eyes meditatively upon the ground.

"Apropos, I met Borgia to-day."

Barbara did not answer.

"I asked him to come in this evening, and he said he was engaged."

"Well?" said Barbara, after a pause, and without turning her head. She was contemplating a spot on the wall. "What then?"

"Oh, nothing," said Cesco, looking at the back of his wife's head. She wore a large silver comb in her shining hair. "That is pretty," he said, coming up behind her chair and touching the comb with his finger. She sat quite still. Her mind was moving rapidly over the many ways in which it was possible to give him some clue to the meaning of Borgia's attitude towards her. "By the way, I shall want you to speak again to your father before he leaves about that money," Cesco continued, turning away and throwing himself down upon the end of the sofa. He reached over and picked up a French novel which was lying on the nearest table, opened it, ran the palm of his hand over the leaves, and let it fall with an exclamation of perfect ennui and weariness.

Barbara took up her pen again and went on writing.

One day — it was during the first few months of their stay at the villa, — she had been attracted to the window by the sound of repeated shots from a gun. Below her, in the courtyard, were Lalli and his intendant. Lalli was holding the gun. He was aiming at something fastened to a pole at the extreme end of the court; something alive, which ran from side to side, and struggled, and flapped a broken wing.

"Oh, it is nothing to make a fuss about," he called out cheerfully, throwing back his handsome head and turning his face up to his wife's balcony. "Come down and see it. It is only the wild hawk that was taken in the nets this morning. I have been trying

the range of my new gun. Look here, that is not so bad for such small shot at that distance,—eh, Tista?" he said, turning to the old intendant. "Look here—and here." He picked up the dying bird by its broken wings and turned over its feathers. "You could cover the places with a sou. That's something rather different from the scattering of that blessed old gun of yours."

"But oh, Cesco, won't you kill it? Look!—oh, please, won't you kill the poor thing at once?" said Barbara, clasping her hands imploringly as the bird began struggling convulsively in his clutch. "See there,—oh, see, it is alive still. I know it is alive."

"Alive? I should rather think it was," said Cesco with a laugh, throwing it down on the ground carelessly and turning on his heel. "It takes something to kill a hawk, eh, Tista? Why, that fellow has at least twenty pellets in him now."

"Twenty at least," said the old man assentingly, bending down and pushing the bird about with his foot. "Eh, signor conte, but that is one who will do no more mischief in the world."

"*Gia! è vero,*" said Cesco indifferently, taking out his handkerchief and brushing a fleck of blood off the back of his hand.

Barbara never forgot the expression of his face at that moment. The whole scene remained photographed on her mind,—the look of the courtyard, the blue of the afternoon sky, the figure of the old man moving away with bowed back across the line of sunshine, the absolute weariness and apathy with

which her husband stood examining the lock of his gun while the tortured creature was slowly dying in the dust at his feet. It was not so much positive, active cruelty; it was not that he took any especial pleasure in inflicting pain, it was merely that he did not care. There was no affectation and no determination in it,—he absolutely did not care. She never forgot it, and she never referred to it in the most distant manner. The scene remained in her mind like a nucleus around which other impressions gathered. Each event was very slight in itself, but not slighter than the series of impressions and impulses which had culminated in her marriage to Lalli. It was merely the same process reversed.

When she had finished her letter, she rose from the table to fetch a photograph of herself which she wished to enclose to Octave. Cesco had fallen asleep. His head was thrown back and his lips parted; the flickering light of the candles made him look as if he were smiling, his lips seemed to move. The air of ennui which had been growing upon him of late had quite disappeared. He was sleeping as lightly and peacefully as a tired boy. One of his arms was thrust under his head, clutching his curly hair,—the other had fallen at his side, the open palm and relaxed fingers were hanging over the edge of the sofa. Barbara bent down softly and lifted this hand gently back. Some impulse made her refrain from waking him; he looked so peaceful, so kind. She blew out all the candles but one, and placed that one high up on the mantelpiece, where the light should not shine

on the eyes of the sleeper. And then she drew her own chair near the open window, and leaned her cheek upon her hand and looked out.

She looked upon the same old familiar silhouette of chimney-pots and tiled roofs. Opposite her window was the convent; its small round belfry made a black line against the sky, and in the open spaces between the rafters she could see the outline of the bells. Beyond the convent roof was a garden with straight, black cypresses; beyond that another mediæval tower. It was a very hot, still night; the air in the street felt breathless. The moon had not yet risen, but beyond the city the horizon was lighted up in places as if from the reflection of a fire. The lamps in the streets looked like fallen stars; they did not seem to radiate light, they merely glittered. At this height there was just wind enough to fill the white muslin curtain; it stirred backwards and forwards, brushing against the polished floor. The only other sound was the low regular breathing of the sleeper.

It seemed such a good world just then to Barbara. All her life long she had let herself be moved by considerations, swayed by influences outside of her own personal wishes and griefs. The serene tranquillity of this limpid summer night was like the strengthening presence of a friend. There seemed reason for trying to be good in a world which was so beautiful.

The convent bell rang out sharply. Lalli moved and muttered something in his sleep.

"Are you awake, dear?" asked Barbara softly, turning her head.

The candle flickered and smoked in the draught on the chimney-piece. Lalli did not answer, he was breathing heavily. . . .

She changed the position of her arm, it was growing cramped with leaning on the window-sill. She sat up, looking straight out before her. Things which Hardinge had said kept coming back; once or twice she smiled; there were so many things she wanted to talk to him about, the next time she saw him — to-morrow. All the intellectual side of her nature had been appealed to, was awakened. And this had been done by a man in thinking of whom she had need of no mental reservations, no fear of coming upon dark corners and baffling walls. And she was glad of it, she told herself, clasping her hands together, and looking up, with eyes which suddenly grew dark and moistened, at the clear starry vault of the sky. She was glad, it was good, that she should have known absolute honesty and faithfulness. It was good to be saved from doubt, not to grow hard and unloving because —

And having reached this point of enthusiasm, she pressed her hand suddenly hard against her lips and began to cry. The tears rolled slowly, one after the other, down her cheeks; she did not brush them away.

The curtain waved regularly to and fro. She could hear the ticking of the clock in the next room, the sound of Cesco's breathing. And she was so young — and so terribly lonely.

The feeling of pleasure, success, the thrill of grati-



fied ambition, the large peace of noble endeavor, these may all come into loveless lives — but not satisfaction. And to have lost that — at one-and-twenty —

Cesco stirred uneasily again. He moved his hand and sighed heavily once or twice. Then his lips parted, he half opened his eyes and spoke, —

“Regina!”

Barbara’s heart seemed to stop beating. She sat perfectly motionless, looking at the opposite wall.

There was a moment of intense silence. The curtain rustled and was still again. Lalli had closed his eyes instinctively, but the sound of his own voice had awakened him, and he knew that he had spoken. At the end of two or three minutes he moved; he sat up, and passed his strong hand slowly through his hair.

“By Jove, I believe I have been asleep!”

He stood up and settled the collar of his coat about his neck.

“I believe I have been asleep. I was dreaming. I was dreaming about my cousin — about Regina.”

“Cesco, —” began Barbara.

She checked herself abruptly, and her head drooped a little forward.

Her husband looked at her sideways. He took the candle from the mantelpiece. His eyelids were heavy and swollen with sleep. “I am so tired, I do not know what I am talking about. Come, Barbara, it is long past your bedtime. Your face is quite white. You will not be fit to do anything to-morrow.”

He held the door open for her to pass.

He laid his hand for an instant on her shoulder as she passed by him ; their two faces were very near together, and Barbara smiled faintly, but she did not speak. How much would it be possible for her to believe of his answer ? She wanted nothing so much as that he should not speak.

When his wife had left the room, Lalli stood quite still for some moments meditating. After a little consideration he walked over to the writing-table and sat down. He began three or four times to write a letter, but after scribbling a few lines he tore each copy into the smallest shreds. Finally, when the dawn was beginning to grow gray behind the house-tops, he succeeded in completing what he had to say. After all it was not a long letter. He addressed it simply "To the Signora Cardella," without adding any number or street.

The next morning at breakfast he announced, rather suddenly, that he was going to Venice.

"I thought," said Mr. Floyd, putting down his newspaper, and turning his unexpectant glance full upon his son-in-law, — "I fancied that I had understood you to say that you should remain in Rome until the end of August."

"Oh, Barbara can stay as long as she likes ; I don't wish her to come before she is ready," said Cesco, pushing away his coffee-cup and rising from the table. He took up his hat to go out, and added, looking at his wife, "On the whole, I think you will find staying here pleasanter. I shall have a lot

of business to look after for the first two or three weeks ; perhaps I shall have to go to Turin. And here you will have Margherita and Miss Damon to take care of you. And Hardinge might bring you on to Venice when he comes."

## CHAPTER XIX.

IN those days it occurred to Madame Raimondi to give a picnic. "I want to see, my dear, who is left in Rome when everybody has gone out of town," she said to Barbara confidentially. "Of course you are coming, both of you —" (It was the day after Miss Damon's arrival. She was sitting in the window, sewing, in the freshest of morning gowns — all over pink frills.) "I am counting upon Octave's reappearance as a pleasant surprise; and oh, my dear child, cannot you bring your cousin, Count Lalli's cousin? I saw her the other day walking with your husband. There is not another such a head and throat in Rome. And what eyes! I wish I were a man; it's the only thing which ever made me wish it," said the flat-faced little Scotchwoman, poking at the rug with her parasol.

"Dear me! Do you really think she is so pretty as all that?" asked Octave placidly, putting her curly head on one side and looking critically at her work.

"Pretty? My dear Octave!"

"There can be no doubt about Regina's beauty," said Barbara in her clear, full, steady voice. Her cheeks flushed a little. "But I think — I am not sure —

but I think that the Cardellas are not in town. I went to call there the other day, and the servant said that either Regina or the baby — I forgot which — was not very well; and Signor Cardella had insisted upon taking them to the country."

"Oh, the husband is a stick. Enrico knows him" (Enrico was Signor Raimondi), the elder woman said carelessly; and then, curiosity prompting her, she added, "But I hear also that he is a stick with a meaning of his own. Quite a *bâton de chef d'orchestre*. He means to give the tone to the whole proceeding. And they say that he is frightfully jealous of his wife."

"Oh, I hope not!" said Barbara ardently, leaning forward and clasping her hands.

"Well, well; we all hope not. It's a cheap wish, as wishes go. And it rather gives one a reason for investigating deeper into such matters," said Madame Raimondi with a short laugh, rising from her chair and adjusting the folds of her scarf. She put out her plump hand, and all the bangles and dangling things which she wore about her fat white wrists rattled and clashed against each other. "Well, good-by, my dear, for the present. You are coming to my picnic, you know. And you won't tell the count that I have been talking scandal about his cousin; talking scandal about Queen Elizabeth, eh?"

"I won't tell him. But Cesco is in Venice," said Barbara, rising too.

"And does that absolutely prevent your writing to him?" said Madame Raimondi, looking at her with

bright eyes. "Dear me! I should never have given you credit for so much philosophy, Barbara. Why, I always imagined that devoted young creatures like yourself were in the habit of writing by every post. Well, well; I suppose a great deal must be forgiven you because you have loved much. Why, it seems only the other day that all Rome was talking of your romantic love-match. You must tell me all about it some day, my dear. I have always meant to ask you more about it. You know I've adopted you quite as one of my own set of girls since you married an Italian. I only wish you would get Miss Octave over there to show as much sense."

"Octave prefers making frills, thank you," said that young lady quickly. And then she added calmly, almost before their visitor was out of earshot, —

"I don't know what you think about it, Barbara, but I consider that woman is growing perfectly insufferable. Her impertinence is always breaking out in new spots, like something that has begun to grow mouldy. I wonder," she said, looking meditatively at the needle she was threading, — "I wonder if she wears that hideous red scarf under the delusion that it takes the color out of her nose? And *I* should consider such a profile a judgment."

And then a minute or two later she made some excuse for leaving her place. She leaned over the back of the chair, and laid her soft cheek gently against Barbara's. Barbara put up one hand and pressed her face closer. For a moment they stood so without speaking, and then Barbara rose from

her seat abruptly and walked straight out of the room.

"Poor dear Baby!" said Octave softly, looking after her. She picked up her work again and sat down on the lower step in the window-seat. A single ray of sunlight came in between the closed shutters, and turned her rough dark hair to a sort of dusky gold incubus about the little head; it shone on some large white roses on the table, and was reflected on the polished floor. The whole room smelt of roses. A bell rang somewhere, and Margherita's voice sounded shrilly from the kitchen. It might be another visitor, Octave thought, and her heart began beating a little faster.

It was the grove of Egeria which Madame Raimondi had selected for her picnic. The carriages were to meet there at five o'clock. There was to be the boiling of a kettle under the trees — "in gypsy fashion," as Madame Raimondi herself explained to the Cavaliere Borgia, leaning on his arm, and waving her hand in the direction of the two or three servants in livery who were collecting sticks from the underbrush with much dignity of gesture.

It was a very breezy afternoon. The wind blew steadily across the open country. The large, rounded white clouds moved rapidly along overhead from south to north; the rest of the sky was of a dark, stainless blue.

Madame Raimondi had collected a large party. They sat on the ground, at the edge of the grove, about a table-cloth spread out on the grass; it was

so hot that the grass broke like straw when one walked over it.

Barbara was seated beside a fat old lady whom she had never seen before, but who looked at her with interest, and asked questions about her father.

"I know Mr. Floyd; I knew him years ago, years before you were born or thought of, my dear. And so you are Douglas Floyd's little girl; and you are married. Dear, dear, how time goes! How very romantic! I should like to have seen your father. And which is your husband, pray? Show him to me; I should like to see him. What—what did you say? You must speak clearly, my dear; this hot weather makes me a little deaf. Which of those young gentlemen is it? Not the one who is flirting so hard with that pretty girl in pink, I hope?"

"Oh dear, no. That is Mr. Hardinge, a friend of ours. My husband is not here; he is in Venice."

"In Venice? How very romantic! And you are going to join him there, of course? But pray tell me, my dear Contessa Lalli,"—she put her hand impressively upon Barbara's arm,—“you said Hardinge, I think. What Hardinges are these? Is this young man one of the New York Hardinges?"

"I think Mr. Hardinge's mother lives in New York. He has just left Oxford."

"Educated at Oxford? Indeed! it sounds very romantic. I have been to Oxford myself; I took my niece there as we were passing through England. And tell me—I don't think you mentioned this young man's Christian name?"



"Walter," said Barbara; "Walter Hardinge."

She spoke very softly; she had never called him by his name before. But evidently this old lady's hearing was capricious.

"Walter," she repeated briskly, putting up her double eye-glass. Hardinge looked quickly across the table at the sound of his own name. "Ah, yes, I thought so. Now that he has moved I see the likeness. He must be the son of old Admiral Hardinge; his name was Walter, I remember. Dear me, Walter Hardinge's son! A very good family that, a very good family to belong to. Riches and religion,—two very good things; and you can't have too much of either, as my poor dear husband used to say. And so your little friend seems to think," she added languidly.

"My friend?" said Barbara.

"The little pink girl. She came with you, did she not? Ah, I thought so. Well, I should say, judging from appearances, you know, that she is quite well aware of what an eligible young man she is talking to. You don't agree with me? Ah, well, I dare say you know best; we are all fallible in this world, especially in such weather." She passed a perfumed handkerchief across her lips. "Is that my vinaigrette lying beside you? Ah, thanks; a thousand thanks. But you are looking quite pale from the heat, my dear? I am afraid the coming here has been too much for you? Really that Madame Raimondi is a most injudicious person; very well intentioned, poor soul, but so injudicious. And to drag us out here at this season of the year. I detest picnics

of all kinds. Really, I do not see how people can be so selfish."

"I hope you have everything you want, and are quite comfortable, dear Mrs. Van Ness?" asked the lady in question, bending across the table.

"Oh, quite, quite. It is really quite too romantic," said Mrs. Van Ness graciously, putting up her eyeglass and smiling at the landscape.

Madame Raimondi was attired for the occasion in a short white gown with scarlet bows. The sleeves of her dress only came down to her elbows. She had wide black velvet bands about her wrists to indicate moral simplicity, and she carried a small basket of fruit on her arm.

"My dear Barbara," she said, "you are eating nothing—positively nothing. I shall have to write to Count Lalli myself if you do not take better care of yourself than that. Let me send you some of Cavaliere Borgia's delicious peaches. Cavaliere, you shall have the pleasure of offering these to the Contessa Lalli in person."

"Oh, thank you, no. Indeed, I don't want anything," said Barbara, rising as she saw the cavaliere approaching. Her getting up was the signal for a general movement. People had finished luncheon; they began walking about in groups and pairs; many of the younger men lighted cigars; there was a general intention to go down and look at the fountain.

In the confusion Barbara had moved away a few steps. Borgia accosted her. "You never answered my letter," he said reproachfully.

Barbara was silent for a moment.

"I never read it."

"Ah," said Borgia, throwing back his head and looking at her from under his eyelids. It was a familiar action of Cesco's. He turned very red, and his large hands began to tremble. "But you will excuse me if I observe — Allow me to remark, signora contessa —"

"Are you going into the grove? or with the others to look at the fountain? Come and sit down in the shadow. It is cooler there, and you are looking horribly tired," said Hardinge, joining them, and speaking in English.

"Yes," said Barbara instantly, turning towards him, and laying her hand upon his proffered arm. She moved away without looking back at Borgia. But she was no longer frightened. When Hardinge had found her a place in the shadow, she seated herself and leaned back against a tree, and drew off her gloves with the feeling that this was rest.

"I saw you being devoured by a horrible old woman," said Hardinge, laughing. "Miss Damon introduced me to her after luncheon, but I fled. She said that she was an old friend of our family. I felt like reminding her that discretion is the better part of friendship. What on earth were you talking to her about all the time those people were feeding?"

"Oh, about you. She was asking questions about you," said Barbara, coloring and reflecting quickly that if indeed things had been as — as Mrs. Van Ness hinted, he would hardly have concerned himself so

much about the movements of his neighbors. It was impossible not to feel happier at the thought.

"Talking about me, was she? I fancied I heard my own name,—the old wretch!" said Hardinge comfortably. He threw back his head, and clasped his hands behind his neck, and looked up at the ilex-branches above him. "I remembered her perfectly—who she is and all that—the moment Miss Damon mentioned her name. That is the worst of Roman society; it is like a rag-bag, it includes everything that has been rejected elsewhere. I remember Mrs. Van Ness at my mother's house when I was a little chap; she used to bully us all round. She had a husband then, a very handsome man, who had been all smashed to pieces in some railway accident."

"Ah, she began telling me about that," said Barbara.

"I believe myself that it was all a dodge on the poor man's part,—an artless attempt at suicide. I should have made it a case of conscience to assist him in carrying out his views, had I been present at the time," said Hardinge, breaking out into his irrepressible boyish laugh. His face too had changed in this last year. Just now he was very much sunburnt, and it made him look older.

Presently the voices of the rest of the party were heard drawing nearer.

"They are coming up the hill," the young man said, looking down between the black ilex-trunks. "Shall we go out and meet them?" He offered her his hand to assist her in rising. "We do not want a mob,

headed by Mrs. Van Ness, in the 'unfooted grove of the gods.'"

For they were standing nearly in the centre of that strange circular group of ilex-trees which crowns the hill. The sunless ground, stricken with immemorial shadow, was bare of grass or flowers. The strong, steady wind swept over the shuddering black branches with a sound like the moaning of an organ. These trees are never silent. There is always wind among these branches; and to stand among them is like listening to the mighty, melancholy voice of the Campagna itself, — the voice of one crying in the wilderness, — the very voice of Rome.

As they went forward to meet the others, Hardinge said, "I shall come to call on you to-morrow evening, if I may, — and bring Lexeter. I expect him to arrive to-morrow."

## CHAPTER XX.

OCTAVE was very silent during the drive home. She went early to her room, complaining of headache. She came down late to breakfast in the morning. It was a long, colorless morning. Neither of the two girls felt entirely at ease, and yet each had a great desire for the society of the other. They laughed and talked much more than was their custom. Octave began describing minutely the life she expected to lead in Paris with her mother; Mrs. Damon was already on her way to Paris. And in the midst of her description she stopped short, and came up to Barbara and put her arms about her neck and kissed her.

"I do love you, Baby," she said, with irrelevant fervor, blushing all over her delicate throat and cheek.

Barbara noted the blush, and her heart contracted painfully. For a minute or two she was silent, and when she did speak it was only to say, "Dear, dear little Octave!" But the tone in which she spoke made the words sound like some passionate pledge of loyalty.

After luncheon Octave went out to drive with Madame Raimondi, who was to take her to the theatre in the evening. After leaving her at the door,

Barbara had herself driven to the church of Santo Stefano. It was a place which she always associated with Hardinge. They had met there once, in the early days of their acquaintance, on one of the first occasions that Lalli had singled her out from the others and drawn her apart. There seemed to be a sort of fitness in going there now; it was like revisiting a turning-point in their lives. As she was driven over the narrow stony byways she was living over again, with an ardent mournfulness, all the hours which she had ever spent with Hardinge. She could see quite clearly how that first feeling of liking and confidence had deepened and strengthened with time and knowledge until now it seemed the only unchecked part of her soul. All the rest was under restraint; silenced because no room had been made for it. She thought of their parting, perhaps forever, in a few more days; and the knowledge that he would never certainly know how much his presence had signified in her life, counted for nothing in that moment of discovery. All that she asked for was to keep an untroubled, undimmed impression of him before her eyes. Failure in life is to have no ideal. She felt that Hardinge had saved her from that experience.

But she had not reckoned upon the effect which the sight of that familiar place would have upon her. She got out of her carriage and walked to the door, past the narrow beds of carnations in bloom. The door was locked. It was late in the season for strangers. The old custodian looked at her curiously;

he fumbled at the key with trembling twisted fingers. "It is the fever," he said, shaking his head dolefully; "the fever, the fever, the fever."

Barbara went in alone. There was a worn stone step at the entrance; she remembered stumbling over it once before, and Lalli's outstretched hand. The church was cold; it struck one with a chill on entering. All the light came from above; it fell on cold circular walls, on pictures of forgotten martyrdoms. It was like passing from one life into another, to step out of the warm, living, impressionable summer day into this very sanctuary of death. There was an air of faded brutality about it all; a sense of dull cruelty and futility, which reduced life to its meanest elements. The stupid violence depicted was like a brutal epigram on all enthusiasm.

A crushing feeling of weariness crept over her. It was one of those moments when the mind turns away, sickened, from any idea of effort or sacrifice, and old watchwords sound empty. As she sat there meditating, a bell rang sharply somewhere overhead. She counted the strokes. Four, five, six o'clock already. And Hardinge had said that he was coming that evening to talk to her.

She would not go directly home. She had herself driven to call upon Monsieur Simon, Lexeter's old and dear friend. She found him sitting up in a large basket-chair, playing at dominoes with his nurse. His face brightened a little with the pleasure of seeing her. She told him that Lexeter was coming soon to call on him, and the old man nodded smilingly.



"*Mais oui, oui. C'est un bon cœur celui là. Il es bien malheureux,*" he said, turning his eyes mechanically towards the place on the wall where her photograph had been accustomed to hang.

She imagined that he did not understand her. What was there to make Lexeter *malheureux*?

In lifting his hand, Monsieur Simon had knocked one or two of his dominoes off the table. He did not observe it, but when Barbara stooped to pick them up he apologized. He thanked her with all his old punctilious deference of manner. The severe lines of his face were scarcely altered; the eyes had only grown a little dull under his heavy, projecting eyebrows; but when he spoke his voice sounded like a child's. He seemed quite contented now.

"Lord bless you, madam, the poor old gentleman was never more comfortable nor peaceful in his life," the nurse said complacently, smoothing down her apron and following Barbara to the door.

She drove home in a mood of discouragement, in which it seemed as if all the tragic realities of life were conspiring together to close in around her. She felt suffocated and entrapped. To reach the house she had to pass before the Hospital of the Consolazione. Once before she had been in there, with Margherita, to see after a woman who was hurt. I think she had almost forgotten the circumstance, but as she passed before the long silent building, it all came back upon her with a rush. She remembered the look of the ward, the sickening stillness of the place. There was one man in particular, with his

arm fastened up above his head by a pulley, — she remembered it all as if it had been yesterday. That helpless swinging arm was like a symbol of all the inevitable helpless misery in the world, and, for the first time, she rebelled at the idea. After all, what one wants most in this world is happiness. We all begin by wanting it for ourselves; most of us, at least while we are young, expect it. After a time one gives up a good deal of the expectation, but I have never yet found that this materially affected the want.

It all comes in the end to a question of unselfishness; but the impulse towards self-sacrifice is like very many other human emotions, and subject to eclipse. And, as Hardinge observed once, there are days when the chief result of having denied one's own wishes and suffered a great deal seems to be the extended capacity for suffering a great deal more. It was one of those days for Barbara.

Dinner was ready and waiting when she entered, but she sent it away untouched. When Margherita remonstrated, she said simply, "I am not hungry. I cannot eat."

The old woman looked at her with a curiously persistent anxiety.

"It — there surely can be no bad news which the signora contessa has heard?" she asked, bending down her head and pretending to arrange the folds of her apron.

"Certainly not. I am only tired," said Barbara, smiling faintly. She added presently, "What possible bad news could I have heard?"

"Eh, Miss Barbara, my dear," said Margherita, slipping back into the old way of speaking, "it's a hard world for everybody at times. And some days, the Lord forgive me! but I wonder if the blessed saints are growing deaf up above there? But *come si fa? mia cara signorina*, with time and patience the mulberry leaf becomes silk, — and very poor-wearing silk it makes, the Lord knows," she muttered, going out of the room, and back into her kitchen.

Barbara had not changed her walking dress.

It was the hottest night of that summer. Every window and door in the great old palace stood wide open; one could even hear voices of people talking on the stairs. She heard a clock far off striking the quarter; she looked at her watch, — it was after nine o'clock. Surely, if Hardinge were coming at all he would not be much later than nine?

There was no perceptible wind, but every now and then the room was filled with the heavy scent of orange-blossom. There was a *festa* of some kind, a saint's day, being celebrated at the small drinking-shop near the corner. To the end of her days Barbara will remember the airs that they were playing, the mechanical tinkling iteration of the dance music that night. The convent bell rang out another quarter. The sound of voices on the stair suddenly grew hushed, and then broke out again much louder. There was a quick heavy step, and then a sharp peal at the bell. Barbara turned suddenly and walked over to the sofa at the farther end of the room and sat down. It was not her usual place. She sat quite still, wait-

ing. The band went on playing its silly teasing waltz, — la-la, la-la, la-la-la. And then it began all over again. One of the violins was always making a blunder on the second bar. Barbara remarked to herself quite composedly that that was always the way with those street musicians. You see they depend entirely upon playing by ear. Now that is all very well, so far as it goes, but when you once begin making mistakes —

Somebody was speaking in whispers in the next room. And there was not another sound in the house.

## CHAPTER XXI

IT was Margherita who came in. Barbara had always known it would be Margherita. She never moved; she only turned her eyes towards the old woman and waited. After all she had never really expected anything else.

"Ah, *signorina, signorina mia!*" the woman cried out pitifully. She wrung her two honest, hard-working hands together, and spread them out dramatically straight before her in a superbly simple gesture of despair.

Barbara, looking at it, reflected quickly that nearly every Italian is a born tragic actor. It is only the Latin races who have that element in their blood.

"Well?" she said. She spoke louder than she had intended, but that was only because her lips were dry.

"Ah, *signorina mia*, it is — it is the Signora Regina. Oh, the poor Signora Regina. I remember her a little child on the Pincian hill with the other children. It seems only the other day. And when she used to look at me with those great eyes of hers, and say, '*Please — good Margherita —*' And such little hands; no bigger than that. And such coaxing ways about her; who ever had the heart to refuse.

her anything ? And now to think of her lying there as good as dead, *santissima Vergine !* as good as dead, and not even her husband with her ! ”

“ Well ? ” said Barbara again.

“ It is the fever, signorina, *la perniciosa*. Ah, you do not know what that is, you others. It is only the Romans who know it. It is the fever that never spares ; they all die of it, some in one day, some in two ; never more than two. And to think of the Signora Regina with her little baby. It was yesterday night, signora, that she started. She took nobody with her but the boy to drive the horses, and he was too young to do anything but what he was told to do, *poveretto !* And all night long they drove across the Campagna ; and when they got into town, they had to lift her out of the carriage, Pietro says, and all day long she has been lying like somebody in a trance. And no one knows when the Signor Cardella is coming, ah, *pover uomo !* they say he is quite mad with jealousy about his wife. He worships the very ground she treads on. And the doctor is with her now, and the sisters. They say she will not pass the night, *povera signorina !* and, if you please, signora, Pietro has come to ask for — They have sent — ”

She stopped short, and looked irresolutely at her young mistress. The band at the corner went on playing its variations : la-la, la-la, la-la-la.

“ And so,” said Barbara, speaking quite calmly and in the tone of a person finishing an old story, — “ and so they have sent here for my husband.”

She got up, still with that air of absolute self-

possession, and walked straight across the room. There was a book lying open on one of the tables. She closed it gently, and pushed it back into its place.

"Will you fetch me my hat, Margherita? And send some one down-stairs to call me a carriage. I shall not take you with me on account of Miss Octave; but—stay. Is there anybody here waiting? any messenger from the Signora Regina?"

There was a shuffling of feet, and some one coughed discreetly behind the door.

"There is Pietro, the Signor Cardella's own man. But—but oh, *signora mia, per l'amor di Dio*, you are not going there—without knowing. The Lord forgive me! but if I had the judging of the Signor Cesco—"

"Don't," said Barbara quickly, lifting her hand.

She stood still, looking down at the floor for a moment.

"When Miss Octave comes home—don't cry, Margherita, it does no good, and I want you to help me in this. When Miss Octave comes home, you will tell her that I have been called out, suddenly, to see a sick person. And you will see that she has something to eat before she goes to bed. And if Mr. Hardinge should call this evening, you will tell him—" She lifted up her eyes and looked at Margherita. "Say that I am sorry not to have seen him," said poor Barbara gently.

She went down the long stairs like somebody in a dream. A man walked in front of her, carrying a

light. It was the same man who helped her into the low carriage.

"It is only a country trap, not fit for the city. But the Signora Cardella chose it because it was so light for the horses. And I hope the signora contessa will excuse it. No one will see the signora, it is so dark."

Barbara thanked him, and got in mechanically. She did not hear a word of what he said. But long afterwards she remembered that the horses wore bells to their collars, like Campagna horses. She was positive about this, because she heard them jingle. The man too was familiar to her. It was a one-seated trap, so that she sat next to the driver; as they passed under the first gas-lamp she looked at him, — she knew his face at once. She had noticed some peculiarity about it the only time she dined at the Cardellas'. She remembered that dinner perfectly, and how Cesco had talked to her on the way home. They had been married three months then —

The servant saw that she recognized him, and touched his hat.

"The poor signora is very bad, very bad indeed," he said gravely. The signora contessa will be very much shocked to see her. The doctor was there when I came away."

"Yes," said Barbara automatically. Regina had looked so very beautiful at that dinner. She remembered speaking of it to Cesco as they came away. She remembered his laughing at her for being so enthusiastic, and saying, —



The carriage stopped with a jerk at the door of the Cardellas' palace. There was another groom waiting here, who ran forward with a lamp. The driver looked at her as he helped her out of the carriage, and she reflected quickly that he must know all about it. Probably, for he was, after all, only a kind-hearted country lad, whom the Signor Cardella had taken from the farm into his service; probably, he was sorry for her.

She thanked him again and went up-stairs.

There had only been two old servants left in the house to look after it, and both had departed. Italian servants never stay where any one is dying. It is considered unlucky. There was no one left in charge but the grooms in the stable and the Sister of Charity, whom the doctor had brought with him. It was an English doctor whom she knew, and his face brightened up at the sight of her.

"Indeed, I am very glad to see some responsible person. You are going in? You are not afraid of the infection? Well, I think you are quite right myself. I don't hold with this theory of the *perniciosa* being contagious. In ninety-nine cases out of a hundred you will find it brought on by imprudence, the most reckless imprudence, as with that poor lady in there. Very shocking case, very. I never saw a sadder. And not a soul to look after the place!"

"Is there no hope then? None? Is there nothing more to do for her? Nothing that —"

She paused between every question, and stopped at last; she could read the answer in his face. She

sat down suddenly and buried her face in her hands.

There was a moment's silence, and then she heard the tinkling of a glass against a decanter, and some wine was held to her lips.

"My dear lady, you are overwrought. Come, come, Signora Lalli; why, this is not like you. This won't do at all. Why, my dear lady, don't you know that I am always holding you up to my patients as an example of the one young woman in the world who can control her nerves?" the old doctor said encouragingly, patting her on the shoulder like a child.

She swallowed a mouthful of the wine obediently. In a moment or two she moved her hands away, and said, "I beg your pardon. I did not mean to be troublesome. But it is all so sudden. And my husband is away. Regina is his cousin, — they were brought up together —" Her voice began to tremble again, but she looked up and smiled faintly at the doctor.

"Just so. Exactly. And a very fortunate thing it is for her that you have come." The servants had been as reticent in their conjectures as Italian servants are wont to be, and Doctor Vincy had not been living thirty years in Rome for nothing.

He turned his keen, steady gray eyes upon Barbara's face for a moment. "H—m," he said, frowning until the bushy eyebrows nearly met across his forehead.

He opened a door softly. "Don't be alarmed at whatever she may say. She will not recognize you."

But when they went in there did not seem much occasion for this warning. Regina was lying on the bed with her eyes closed. Her cheeks were flushed to a dark purplish red. One round white arm was stretched out over the coverlet. It was a blue silk coverlet with a long fringe; her fingers kept plucking at the fringe.

"H—m," said the doctor, looking down at her.

He held her hand in his for a moment, and then laid it gently back upon the pillow. The fingers began contentedly plucking at the pillow.

"H—m," said the doctor again, shaking his old head.

He went away into a corner of the room, and began talking to the nurse in a low tone. Barbara sat down in the chair by the bedside.

How long she sat there she never could tell. But perhaps it was not many minutes before the doctor came back. He no longer spoke under his breath, and there was something hopeless in the very fact that such words could be fearlessly spoken.

"You will stay here for the remainder of the night? Or at all events until — until there is no necessity for further attendance?"

"Yes," said Barbara just audibly.

"Ah! That is, I think, the best arrangement. It is, indeed, all we can do. I will not trouble you with any directions; the nurse knows what is to be done, — the stimulant, when she can be got to take it. And this ice can be changed on her head." He took a pair of glasses out of his pocket, and began fitting

them on slowly. "I shall return about four o'clock. It is not likely that there will be any change sooner. And I shall bring Dr. Guastalla with me. It will always be satisfactory to the family — I have taken upon myself to telegraph to Signor Cardella. He can hardly be here before the morning train from Naples, but if he should arrive — I fear, from what the servants say, that this poor lady left home somewhat in defiance of his wishes, and he — In case he comes —"

"I shall be here," said Barbara simply, laying her own cool hand protectingly upon the clutching fingers, and looking up at the doctor with a clear, solemn gaze.

I have never heard old Dr. Vincy quoted as a man of imagination before or since, but it is an undoubted fact that he told his wife subsequently that the Contessa Lalli had looked at him with the face of an angel.

"Pooh, my dear," said Mrs. Vincy promptly. She had known Barbara Floyd in the days when she wore short frocks, and she had no patience, not she! with a girl who married an Italian.

Perhaps the very strangest thing about totally exceptional events is that they seem so simple when they happen. Barbara never could recollect afterwards how long it was, but it seemed a long time that this silent vigil lasted. Once the nurse got up and went to the door. There was some whispering, and when she returned to her place she said something about sending for the priest to administer extreme unction.

"Oh, not yet!" said Barbara fervently. It seemed like giving up the last hope.

"The signora contessa is not, I imagine, of our religion?" the sister asked gravely. After that she seemed less inclined to converse. She sat quite motionless, with bent head, 'telling over her rosary. From time to time she rose noiselessly to freshen the cloths with vinegar. After a while she looked up quietly and said, —

"If the signora has anything especial to say to the Signora Cardella she had better be ready. She is waking now;" and even as she spoke Regina's heavy eyelashes quivered. She sighed once or twice, and asked for water. Barbara took a glass from the nurse and held it to her lips. Her hand trembled so that great drops of the medicine fell and stained the sheet.

"Dear Regina, do you know me? I am Barbara," she said.

Regina opened her wild, mournful eyes and looked at her. At that moment, with her flushed face, and her bare arms, and her heavy hair unbound upon the pillow, she was so gloriously beautiful that even the nurse was startled.

She said, "I want Cesco."

Barbara turned white to the very lips, but she answered at once, trying to speak slowly and clearly, "Poor Cesco is not here; he is very far away — in Venice. He will be very sorry when he knows. But if there is anything that you want to say to him, and you will tell me, I promise you that I will repeat

it. You can trust me — indeed you can trust me. I am so sorry for you — ”

Her voice had grown as urgent as some inarticulate cry for help. She was only conscious of living through her own and Regina's suffering.

Regina looked at her now with a sort of apathetic wonder.

“It was a cruel letter,” she said slowly. And then, after a long pause, “Mamma would never let us meet. Sometimes I could speak to him on the stairs — the old stairs at home. — And Ugo will not let me see him. — Cesco — ”

She suddenly raised herself up in the bed and stretched her arms straight out before her. The movement was so unexpected that the sister had not even time to put her arm behind her and assist her rising. She said, —

“I want Cesco. I blew the candles — out — before the Madonna — and it is — dark — on the stairs — ”

“Regina — Oh, I cannot bear it. My heart will break,” Barbara said passionately, and speaking English. She took hold of both the dying woman's hands: “Regina, my poor girl, have you not a word to say — nothing — for your husband, for your little child? Good God, it is impossible, impossible that she should die like this. Regina!”

There was an instant of absolute breathless silence.

“She is going off again,” the nurse said significantly, feeling the weight grow heavier on her shoulder. She lowered her arm cautiously, and as she did so Regina looked up into her face with that resplendent,

wide-eyed glance of hers, and laughed. She laughed aloud, like a child, as Barbara had never heard her laugh before. In what little intercourse there had ever been between them, the Italian girl had always acted on the defensive; Barbara had seen her reticent, sneering, sulky; she had never in any way connected the idea of simple joyousness with that magnificent beauty. And now, even as they leaned over her, her eyelids drooped, and a changed, sharpened look came over her face. They laid her back on the pillows and waited.

The Cardellas' house was a very old palace at the corner of what is now one of the new boulevards of modern Rome. It faced a street running directly across the city from one to the opposite gate. Towards morning, Barbara was aware of a faint, distant, continuous noise, — something unclassifiable: a noise which at one moment seemed sharp and at another muffled, which swelled and decreased in volume without ever absolutely ceasing, and which was distinctly drawing nearer. When she first realized that she was hearing it, she had already been unconsciously listening to it for many minutes. It had already begun to assume a definite form, to divide itself into two clearly defined sounds, the muffled footfall of a myriad feet and the shrill, incessant, multitudinous cry of a crowd of animals.

"It is the sheep changing pasture," the nurse said, laying down her rosary and listening.

It was a flock of sheep being driven from one part of the Campagna to another, and crossing the city in

the dead of night. For nearly a mile the narrow street was blocked with a dim moving mass, now dark and struggling, and now nearly white, as it was lost in the shadow of the houses or emerged into the dim moonlight of the cross-streets. There were thousands upon thousands of them, herded by silent dogs and watched over by mounted shepherds, clothed in shaggy goat-skins, and armed with long lances to which their lanterns were fastened.

In a very few minutes the room was filled with the growing, strident bleat of the sheep. The air grew impregnated with a wild, musky smell. In a moment, out of the silent summer night, there had arisen the cry of thousands of struggling creatures. The noise which they made was like nothing describable, nothing imaginable. It did away at once with all civilization. It was like something born of the night, something alien, inarticulate, wild, and strange beyond description.

And all this time Regina never moved.

The clamor died away slowly, like the passing of the wild train of some witches' sabbath. By and by the doctors came again. There were two of them now. They came into the room and went out again, and Barbara answered when they spoke to her.

After a time some one touched her on the shoulder gently. She looked up; there was a man followed by a boy standing in the doorway, and the man was dressed like a priest. And then somebody asked Barbara to wait in the next room.

She went in, and the door was shut behind her.



She went and stood by the window ; the morning sky was turning gray. Regina's bird was awakened by the glare of the paling candle ; he hopped restlessly about his cage. Presently he began to sing.

And then Dr. Vincy came in.

She half rose from her seat and looked at him. "My dear lady," he said, coming up and taking one of her hands in his ; "my dear young lady —"

"And she never spoke again ? She said nothing ? — nothing ?" asked Barbara, with a sickening prevision of what was coming.

"Nothing," the doctor said ; "she went quite quietly ; she hardly suffered. There was not a chance of saving her from the very first."

Barbara had reached the utmost limit of all power of resistance. She could do nothing now but sob helplessly and let herself be taken care of as they chose. She had begged to be the first who spoke to Signor Cárdezza ; but when they brought him to her, she could only hold out her hands to him in helpless pity, crying out, —

"I wish I could have done something for her. I wish that I could have got her to speak to me."

It was nearly twelve o'clock before the doctor would let her be driven home. As they drew near her own house, he noticed that she began to tremble violently. He looked out of the carriage-window and saw a young man stepping rather quickly across the street. The old doctor looked at him hard for a moment.

"Ah," he said, "I thought I recognized that young-

ster. There goes young Hardinge. Now I wonder what he is doing in Rome at this season?"

It was a good-natured attempt to divert the poor young lady's melancholy thoughts. But Dr. Viney was not astonished that she did not answer. He was accustomed to a lack of self-control in women.

## CHAPTER XXII.

IT was the fact of the Florence train being an hour late which had prevented Hardinge from calling on Barbara. By the time Lexeter had washed off some of his travel-stains and eaten a leisurely dinner it was too late for anything but a stroll out into the moonlight — “If you are sure that you are not too tired, old fellow?” — said Hardinge, stopping to light his cigar in the hotel-passage.

They stepped out into the street together.

“Which way?”

“Oh, Capitol,” said Lexeter, thrusting his hands into his pockets and turning down towards the Corso.

It was nearly eleven o'clock, but the street was still crowded with slowly passing Romans. Light summery dresses flitted constantly past them. The air was full of light laughter and quick voices, and the tripping, tinkling sound of the mandoline from every little wine-shop.

“And to think that I was sitting in chambers in London three days ago,” said Lexeter, looking contentedly around him.

“Ah! town won't be very cheerful now.”

“About as cheerful as a locked-up trunk. And if you could have seen the fog the day I left. Good

Lord! Well!"—they had got to the foot of the Capitoline hill, and Lexeter stopped deliberately and seated himself on one of the lower steps of the stairway—"I never feel myself thoroughly out of England until I find myself reclining picturesquely upon a public monument. And to sit without one's hat in the public thoroughfare—well, I should not like at this moment to be called upon to define the privileges of a Briton. Go on, old boy, you were saying—"

"Oh, nothing particular. I say, Lexeter."

"Well?"

"You have n't half asked after your old acquaintances. By the way, one of them is gone. Old Floyd—you remember him? You used to be awful pals. Well, he sailed about a fortnight ago for America."

"Ah! and have you—have you happened to see any of the others lately?"

"I was to have called on the Contessa Lalli to-night, you know. I told you so."

"No, you said nothing of the kind," said Lexeter slowly.

"Ah well, I meant to. It comes very much to the same thing," said Hardinge, beginning to whistle. He looked up at a star precisely above him. "Jolly night, this. As I was not saying, then, there is one character in history, now happily defunct, for whom I have always entertained the liveliest sympathy,—and that is the last young lady who was chained to the rock before Andromeda. I fancy her relatives and friends must have had a very slight opinion of Perseus."

Lexeter looked at the ground.

"There are moments when I am absolutely convinced that women are merely the creatures of accident."

Hardinge glanced at him quickly, remembering something which Clifford Dix had hinted.

"Not all women. There are exceptions here and there," he said rather awkwardly. He threw away the end of his cigar. "Come along to the top and have a look at old Marcus Aurelius."

The hollow square of the palace was all in shadow. As they came up the steps, the imperial horseman and horse of bronze were merely a darker shade upon the shadowy background of the piazza. On the loggia of each façade, antique figures of Greek gods and Roman deities lifted in various attitudes of grace and dignity against the limpid moonlit sky. All else was darkness. They could not even see the fountain, they could only hear the cool sound of its falling water plashing into the wide, shallow, brimming marble basin at their feet.

Hardinge went forward a few steps: "By Jove, Lexeter, look at that!" Rising into the tepid air, against the fleecy drifting clouds of an Italian summer night, they looked up at the great statue of the emperor. It rose between them and the moonlight, a muffled figure with outstretched arm and outspread hand coming dark and distinct against the sky. Centuries of life seemed to fall away; it was indeed the imperial hand of Marcus Aurelius, imperious but benignant, a hand to urge and restrain, — a hand of

command and clemency, raised, as if in solemn warning, over the merciless sleeping city, across those blood-sprinkled steps of the Capitol, at whose base life and liberty have sunk so often, unpitied and incarnadine, in the dust.

They stood looking at it in silence for a minute or two, and then Lexeter said abruptly, "Look here, Hardinge. You were speaking of Andromeda. Did you mean anything in particular? I mean anything about Miss Floyd that was."

I don't know what possessed Hardinge. "No," he said, after a moment's deliberation. He consoled himself afterwards with reflecting that this was not altogether a falsehood. I do not understand where he saw the difference myself.

"I ask the question," Lexeter added calmly, "because of the great, the very great liking and admiration, which I have for Barbara. As you said a little while ago, I am her father's friend—" Hardinge raised his eyebrows and looked at Marcus Aurelius.

"I happen to know—I am not at liberty to tell you how—that she was particularly in love with her husband. Mr. Floyd talked to me about it weeks before their engagement. At a picnic down at Ostia; I dare say you don't remember it. And it would distress me very much to hear that her marriage was a failure."

"My dear fellow, if I wished to be cynical—which I don't—I would answer you that every marriage in a certain sense is a failure. No woman ever marries exactly the man she fell in love with; especially not

an imaginative and generous-natured girl like Miss Floyd. I've no doubt she looked upon Lalli as the embodiment of honor and courage and chivalry when she married him. I don't; but then that is a mere matter of private opinion. I don't know of anything against him, mind you. But I don't like his style. I don't like the men he associates with. That fellow Borgia, for instance. I consider Cavaliere Borgia, dispassionately speaking, a cad. The opinion is quite dispassionate, for I don't think I've ever exchanged six words with him in my life."

He drew out his cigar-case and lighted another cigar.

"Smoke? you won't find them so bad in their way. The fact is, Lexeter, the most damning thing I know about Lalli is what I have heard you say yourself, — that all his good qualities are thrust upon the public like so many advertisements. I quite agree with you there. And so does Miss Damon," he added in a lower voice.

"Ah!" said Lexeter. He took out a match and struck it. "Have you seen any English papers lately? Seen that last row at Berlin about Alsace-Lorraine?"

The next day he went out early in the afternoon, and called on the Contessa Lalli. Margherita opened the door to him, and informed him blankly that the signora did not receive.

About an hour afterwards Hardinge called on the same errand. But instead of letting himself be sent away, he asked for Miss Damon.

Miss Octave had gone out for a few moments, but

if the signore cared to wait in the drawing-room — ? The signore expressed his entire readiness.

He had been waiting some quarter of an hour or so in the cool, flower-scented room ; he had had time to walk about and look at Barbara's books, at Octave's music scattered over the piano ; he was standing by the table fingering the odds and ends which filled Octave's work-basket when the door opened rather suddenly. She had come home.

"Why have you bought so many pairs of scissors since you left Sorrento, Miss Damon ?"

"Oh," said Octave, putting out both hands, "I am so miserable ! I am so glad that you have come !"

It was the first time that he had ever seen her in trouble. The sight of her trembling lips was like the signal for the awaking of all the tenderness in his nature. He spoke quite abruptly.

"Will you tell me all about it ? Tell me, Octave ; tell me !" He took both her little gloved hands in his, and kissed them one after the other devoutly.

Octave remained quite passive. She stood looking at him for nearly a minute without speaking.

Presently he said, "Will you come and sit on the sofa ? And may I take off your hat ? Will you let me touch your beautiful hair ? My dear, my love ! I don't know how to say it to you. Words are not good enough. I should like to kneel down before you. I love you. I worship you. May I tell you how I love you, Octave ?"

She laid her two hands softly together, and turned her face towards him. They sat in this way looking



at each other for another minute or two, and then Hardinge moved and put his strong arm gently about her.

"I should like to be allowed to devote all the rest of my life to you. I should like to spend my life in making you happy. My dear, will you let me try if I can do it?"

"Yes," said Octave, dropping her eyes gravely and sighing.

He put his hand gently against her cheek, and lifted up her face towards him. He hesitated for an instant, and then bent down and kissed her on the lips.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

IT was some time before Hardinge thought of saying, "You were in trouble when you came in, and you have not told me why. May I not be allowed to help you?"

"It was about poor Baby. Oh, I had forgotten her. She was asleep when I went out. I will go and see if she is awake now."

"And you will come back soon? Otherwise I shall not let you go," said Hardinge playfully.

She came back in the course of two or three minutes.

"She is asleep. I did not awake her; I only opened the door and looked in." She had not heard yet of Regina's death; she only knew that Barbara had been sitting up with her; she began telling Hardinge about it. "Poor Barbara! she is so good, — I don't think there is anybody better than Barbara. And yet she is always making mistakes. Walter?"

"Yes, dear."

"I wonder if I ought to tell you something?"

"Yes; tell me," said Hardinge, taking up her hand and kissing it.

"It is a secret, you know. Nobody knows of it but you. But — but Cesco Lalli asked me to marry him once; ages ago."

"He did, did he? By Jove, I—"

"Hush. I told you you were not to be angry. And I did not want to marry an Italian," said Octave softly. "It was different with Barbara. She always had ideas. Poor Barbara!"

Everywhere about the room there were flat dishes filled with large white roses. Octave's gown was the only other light spot in the semi-darkness. Far down the hot street they could hear the strident cry of some fruit-seller. "I should like," said Octave, "to tell no one before I see mamma about—this." She rested her smooth cheek contentedly against his shoulder. "And now that Barbara looks so unhappy—I don't think—I am afraid Count Lalli is not very kind to her. And it would seem so unkind to tell her just now about—us."

"Then you shall tell her when you like," said Hardinge. What would he not have promised at that moment? She was so sweet, so shy, so precious; he hardly dared do more than look at her. He touched her reverently, with an exquisite yearning pang of tenderness as one would touch a flower. This keen-eyed, determined, and rather careless young man found himself suddenly transported into an entirely new world of sensations. A fortnight ago he might have spoken perhaps of Octave as of a charming and pretty girl. She was his queen now, set above all meaner praise than that of silent and impassioned service.

For all these hours Barbara had been lying on the sofa in her dressing-room. She was not asleep, as

Octave had imagined. The first horror of shrinking from the implacable clutch of this anguish was over. She gazed now at her sorrow in the face; she recognized it as a companion. When Octave opened the door and looked in, she had reached a stage of passive exhaustion. The first cruel force of her indignation — her outraged pride — was spent. She could think almost calmly now of meeting her husband. She was beginning to pity him rather than herself. After a long while she heard a bell ring sharply; the sound aroused her. She sat up and pushed back her loosened hair. A moment later she heard Octave's step in the passage, and she sank back among her pillows; she was not ready to see any one yet. But the thought of Octave came to her like a living touch. Dear little Octave, poor child; knowing nothing as yet of the cruel, branding experiences of life; — from the depths of her own grief Barbara felt like stretching tender, protecting arms about her. She began little by little to merge her own sorrow in a growing sense of human fellowship. She saw again vividly before her the expression of blank despair on Ugo Cardella's austere countenance; and she reproached herself with not having done more for him. She lay quite motionless, with her pale cheek resting on her hand, and her clear, mournful gaze fixed upon the opposite wall; but what she was really seeing was a continually increasing multitude of claims and duties, — all the sorrow of the world stretched out helpless hands towards her. It was an hour of solemn initiation; one of those impassioned moods whose duration

is measured by moments of intolerable enthusiasm, leaving landmarks for a whole life's direction. It was one of those experiences which make us strong and which make us dumb. High tides or an earthquake are not continuous manifestations, and yet there is more evidence of their passage on the land than of all the smiling fruitful years. Duty, — fatal implacable tyrant! nobler than emperor, more insatiable than Cæsar, — let those who know what it is to stand beside the grave wherein lies buried all thought of personal good and joy; let those who have renounced, — the world's nameless martyrs, looking forward to no resurrection dawn, — let those about to live salute thee.

She rose, steadying herself by the back of a chair, for she was chilled with exhaustion and giddy with lack of food. She rose and walked languidly over to the window and pushed open the blind. It seemed to her that days had passed since she entered that room, and it was yet afternoon. The joyous blue and white sky was still full of sunshine and light. It was like going back into life. The first sickening sense of isolation in her sorrow was past. She began languidly to rearrange her hair; presently she rang for her maid to come and help her. She would go out and speak to Octave now; she would send for Hardinge. They would be ready to accept what she told them. And Regina's name was safe. And it was a great deal to have the friendship of those two, — she thought of each of them apart. Mrs. Van Ness's words remained like nothing more than an uneasy

memory. It was impossible, — when she had nothing else to love in the world, — impossible that anything could occur to widen the distance which must forever remain between herself and Hardinge. She knew perfectly well now that she loved him, and there was a mournful delight and pride in the thought that she cared above all for what was highest in him, with a love that could only be intensified by time and privation. And courage was easier when she thought of this. She was ready to renounce all the desires, all the exigencies of love, so that she might still go on loving him. She did not expect personal happiness; she only clung to the belief that he would not change as everything else had changed about her. And even this seemed much. For she herself was changed. She was as one who has looked for some ineffaceable instant upon the head of the Medusa, who has seen and touched the darker possibilities of life, — to whom forever after the spring fields and the untroubled laugh of children shall come fraught with a sense of passionate significance and loss.

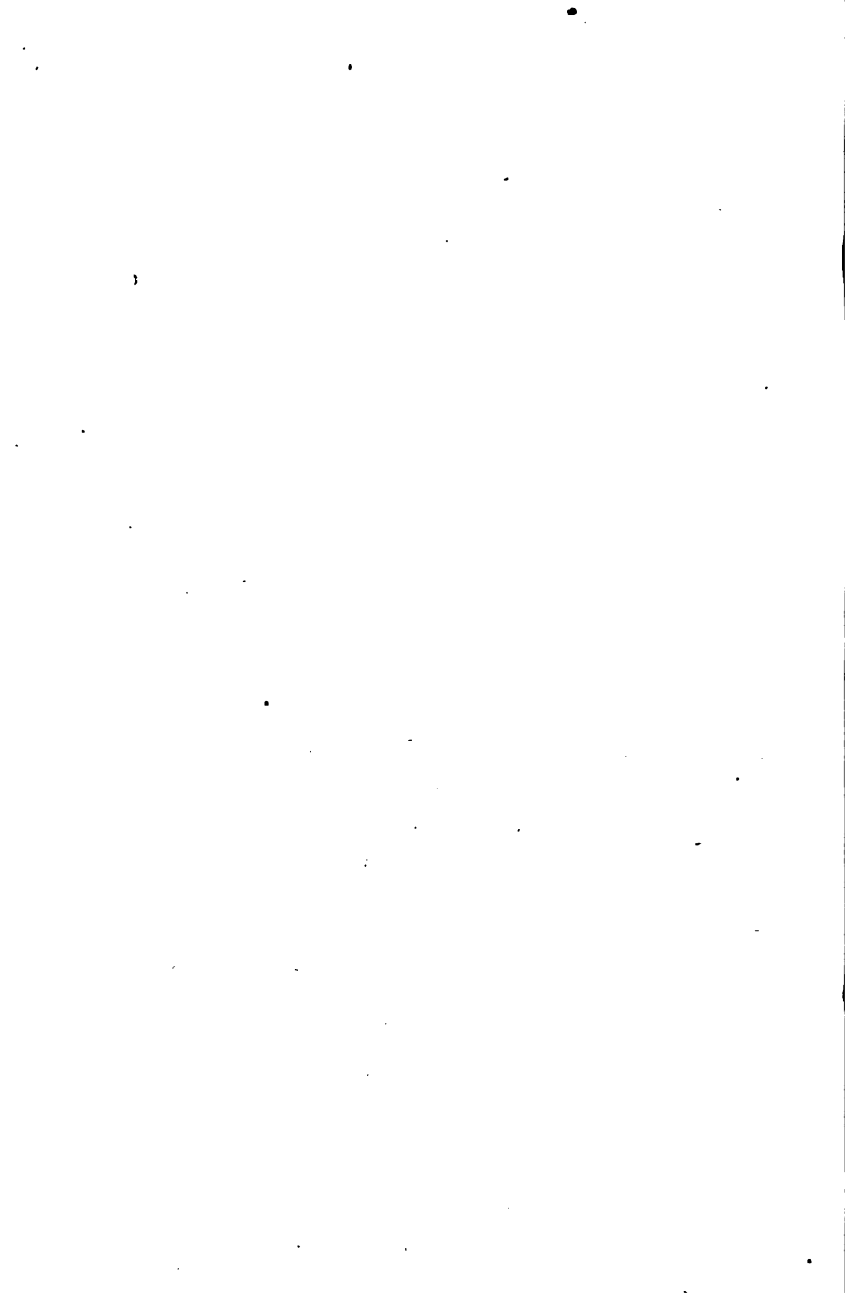


## BOOK III.

### ΑΝΑΓΚΗ.

"It is hard to lose the dream of a life ; and when that dream has drawn all its lustre from virtue, when joy has been conceived only in the loving service of the noblest being, the highest ideal we know, then if a man sees his ideal crushed before his eyes, and feels that honor itself has turned against him, and that because he has disdained base things he has lost all, — then shall it be known if his virtue is a derivative and conquerable thing, or has in it an inbred energy that is incapable of despair. If he can raise his head to fight anew, he will find all fighting easy now. The worst has come to the worst ; henceforth can no man trouble him ; he bears in his spirit the tidemark of its highest woe." — FREDERIC MYERS.





## CHAPTER XXIV.

ONE October afternoon we were sitting in the inner porch of the church of San Marco at Venice, and we were talking. To us presently appeared a small party of three: husband, wife, and unmistakable courier.

"Fellow-Britons abroad," observed my companion resignedly; and we sighed and looked.

They stepped out of the sunshine into the shadow of the atrium, and the lady opened her hand-bag and produced a book.

"We need not go in; we have seen this place already, my dear," she remarked triumphantly, after consulting some entry.

"Do you think so, my love? It looks very pretty. But I have no recollection of it, really," said her husband very mildly, gazing about him with a polite and deprecatory air.

"I am sure of it. Because it is crossed out in my book," his wife continued, shutting up her bag with an emphatic snap; and forthwith they departed, followed by an impassive courier, and I trust spent the remainder of that autumn afternoon profitably in the purchase of many glass beads.

And then we went out and sat down at the foot of

the loggia of Sansovino, and gazed at our beloved church. It rose before us like a thing of the dawn and of the sunset; strange, fantastic, beautiful. From the dawn had come its color and from the night its mystery. Like the gorgeous fabric of a dream we saw it; lustrous with the glitter of gold; rich with slabs of veined and colored marble and curious Byzantine sculptures; sheeny like a dove's neck; delicate and lovely in tone like a shell; low-domed, column upon column, florid arch upon florid arch; pale and gleaming and splendid with the spoils of centuries of conquest. Set above the Adriatic tides, which come and lave its marble slabs and lapse away sighing to the sea, St. Mark's Church, sea-washed, sea-worn, a thing of the sea and sky, is forever touched and transfigured by the changes of both, gleaming under the one, and reflected in the shallow pools of the other, — pools which fill its very porches in the high tides of early spring and autumn.

As we sat watching all this, we saw a beautiful and intelligent collie-dog, who had been lying patiently for some time past with his nose between his paws and his wistful eyes fixed upon the church door, spring to his feet and make a rush at a man crossing the piazza.

"Hallo, Prince!" we heard the man say; "why, what are you doing here? Where is your master, sir?"

The dog whined and barked and fawned in the shape of a comma about the man's legs.

"I know that man," observed Lawrence; "his name

is Lexeter. He writes for the — Review. He is a capital fellow. If he comes over here, I'll introduce him to you."

But Lexeter did not come toward us; he turned into the church. He was evidently looking for some one, and presently he caught sight of her in the person of a tall, rather sad-faced girl, who was seated on the marble bench at the foot of one of the pillars. There were only a few people left in church; the organ was playing for the benediction. She appeared to be listening to the music; her lips were slightly parted; she was looking at the blue-robed angel of the mosaic overhead, and there was something in her action and expression, and in the way the light fell upon her upturned face, which recalled the face of Titian's Madonna in the great Assumption picture at the Belle Arti.

She did not observe Lexeter until he was very near her, and then it was beautiful to see how her whole look changed. She turned to him gladly, holding out her hand with a full, cordial smile.

"You have come back? I am so pleased. We did not expect you back until to-morrow."

"Oh, Rimini was hot," said Lexeter, "and it became a personal question between myself and the landlord whether I should be driven up to inspect the Republic of San Martino. It was quite useless my assuring him that I object to all republics. And then I thought I would come and see Hardinge off."

"He goes to-night," said Barbara.

"He is not coming back again to Italy?"

"No."

The organist began playing the Ave Verum of Pergolese. The red sunlight stole higher up the golden dome; it touched the angel's folded hands.

"Do you remember what Thackeray says somewhere, I think it is in one of his 'Roundabout Papers,' about success?" asked Lexeter abruptly. "He says there is something which justifies itself, something godlike, in all success. Well, I am beginning to believe the contrary, or rather —"

He hesitated.

Barbara turned and looked at him.

"I believe," said Lexeter, "that to accept failure nobly is to surpass success."

She was silent for a moment.

"Why do you say this to me, Mr. Lexeter?"

Her voice had a way of changing; when she spoke impulsively it had at times the clear, colorless ring of a child's voice.

"Oh," said Lexeter almost harshly, "who does not end by accepting less than he asked for? We begin by claiming happiness, we end by being thankful when we are not hurt. And people call that experience. There is a man here — Denis Lawrence, I saw him a moment ago on the Piazza — who used to have a favorite saying: *On naît demi-dieu et l'on meurt épicier.*"

"But don't you think — don't you really think it is something to have recognized and wanted the best?" said Barbara.

"Ah," said Lexeter. He got up and stood before

her; he was not looking at her, he was looking past her and overhead at the great golden and blue and white angel. "It seems odd, does it not, that all our particular Roman set of a year ago should be so scattered? There is yourself married, and Clifford Dix gone to America, and — and Hardinge —"

The organ stopped playing with a sort of jerk. It is very much out of tune; all the church organs want tuning in Italy.

"Do you know how soon Hardinge is going to marry Miss Damon?" Lexeter asked.

He went on without giving her time to answer: "Generally one does not mind much about a man's marriage. But one can never help taking a peculiar interest in what concerns Walter. I never liked any other man half so well. And I really believe he is doing the best thing for himself possible — now. Under all that easy way of his he has a very devoted nature. If he had fallen in love with — with any woman he could not marry, it would have gone very hard with Walter. Some men — oh, some men," said poor Lexeter, "are made to bear that sort of thing. At least, they have to take life pretty much as it comes to them. But Walter —"

Years after Barbara remembered the action of his hands as he was speaking. He was standing in front of her, and his hands were gripped together so that each vein and muscle stood out under the skin. It was like the wordless confession of some supreme struggle. Barbara thought it was because he was so kind and so sorry for her. Perhaps it was.

She stood up now and looked at him full in the face. "Listen!" she said. "I did not know this before. You were right in thinking that I did not know it, and I am glad that you have told me. I want you to remember this always. I was glad — I will be glad of all the happiness that comes to Walter and — and Octave. We shall miss him, you know — but — However dear people may become, one must be glad when they find their own happiness — even away from us."

She was speaking under the force of an emotion which made her forget everything but what she was saying. Lexeter had ceased to be a man and a comparative stranger; he had lost all individuality; she was speaking to him as from one human soul to another. And he felt this perfectly.

"God bless you, Barbara!" he said. He took her hand in his. "If I do not see you again I want you to remember this, — that I did not believe very much in women when I first knew you; but you have taught me to think of all women better for your sake. I don't suppose it makes very much difference to you what I think," said poor Lexeter; "but perhaps some time you will be glad to remember that I said this. And — and —" He looked at her hand which he held, and then at her face, and then up at the splendid winged angel against the gold mosaic. Afterwards he thought, with a pang of regret, that he might have kissed her hand and that he did not do it.

"And so — God bless you, my dear!" he said.

That was how they parted.

CHAPTER XXV.

THERE was a new piece being given at the Opera that night, and the Lallis had a box. Hardinge had promised to come in and say good-by to them there; he was leaving with the Trieste boat at eleven o'clock. He joined them rather late; the first act was nearly over. He carried some flowers in his hand — for Barbara.

There was some little talk about the new music when he first came in, and then Lalli said, —

"But you are really going this evening, Signor Hardinge?"

"Naturally," said Hardinge, looking at him with some surprise. He was struck by the peculiar expression of Cesco's countenance.

"And you will not return again? We shall not have the pleasure of welcoming you back again to *la nostra bella Italia*? You really abandon us? You leave us desolate?" Cesco persisted.

"Oh, as for being desolate — But I really wish that I could persuade you to come for a little while to Vienna. Why should you not? The journey is nothing, and you like travelling," he said, looking at Barbara. He added in a lower voice, "You know the Damons will be there. It is unkind of you not



to come when we all want you. Why will you not try it — just for a little while ?”

“Oh, hush, please! You know you must not talk now. You must listen to the music,” said Barbara, smiling faintly, and turning her face to the stage.

But the picture which his words had conjured up was too much for her. All the time that the tenor was singing his great aria her lips and cheeks were growing whiter. When the song was ended she rose while the theatre was still ringing with applause.

“You are ill?” asked Hardinge, looking and starting to his feet. “Do sit down again. Let me go and fetch you something.”

“The best thing for her would be to go home,” said Lalli, speaking at the same moment. “And fortunately I told the gondolier to wait at the door. I will go and see if he is there.”

He took up his hat and went out into the corridor.

“I do so wish you would let me get you something? — do something for you?” Hardinge persisted, looking at her anxiously. “At least, may I not put your cloak about you?”

He wrapped the white fur-lined thing gently about her shoulders, and she looked up at him and smiled without speaking. She would have liked to die at that moment.

And then the door opened and Cesco came in again.

“All right, Barbara. You can come down when you are ready. Gently now. Hardinge, will you give my wife your arm? You will be quite well as soon

as you get into the open air. It is nothing. It is only a little faintness."

He led the way down the stairs to the gondola — the music had begun again, and there was another burst of applause — and handed her in.

"Hardinge will see you home," he said.

He gave an order to the men, and the boat pushed off.

It was an absolutely black night. The water glittered like ink ; the light of the lamps seemed to slip over its surface as over something hard and polished. The wind was blowing up for the beginning of the equinoctial storm ; the boat could hardly make head-way against the roughness of the smaller canals. The troubled water beat heavily against her bows, every bit of woodwork creaked and strained as the wind seized hold of the *felse*. There was not another boat to be seen moving across the lagoon. And all about them, from far and near the air was filled with the lonely cry of the wild sea-birds blown in by the storm. The cries came all from overhead, from the house-tops.

"Curlews," said Hardinge to himself under his breath.

The Lallis had rooms on the Riva de' Schiavoni. They crossed a bit of the open lagoon, keeping close to the edge of the shipping. The fishing-boats moored to the riva were knocking against one another. They passed close under the bows of a small steamer riding uneasily at anchor. It was the Trieste boat, getting up steam.

Barbara had not moved or spoken since they started. She sat leaning back in the corner, so that her face was in deep shadow. The light shone in at the window on her hands and on the flowers she held.

"This is rough work for you. You are not frightened? But it seems more dangerous than it really is. It almost needs a miracle to upset one of these flat-bottomed boats," Hardinge said once.

She shook her head. She was not frightened.

The wind seized hold of her light dress and blew it tightly about her as she stepped out of the boat on the landing.

"May I come up-stairs with you?" Hardinge asked; "I have three quarters of an hour still before my boat leaves, and I should like to come in and say good-by to you if I may."

They went into the room together, and Barbara walked over to the table and turned up the lamp. She sat down with her cloak still falling in straight white folds about her: she had taken a seat near the window.

Hardinge came and stood beside her.

"There is nothing I hate so much as saying good-by to people. And we have been such friends. You have been so awfully kind to me. I shall always think of you when I remember Rome. You are mixed up with the very happiest part of my life," he said, looking at her with his boyish smile while all his face flushed and softened. It seemed very hard that Octave would not allow him to speak.

"Yes. We shall always remember each other,"

said Barbara, in her clear tender tones. Her voice shook just perceptibly. She was the first to notice it, and she rose instantly and crossed over to a writing-table which stood against the wall. She opened one of its drawers and took out a jewel-case. "I want you to do something for me," she said, turning and walking back towards him with this box in her hand. "You must not be angry with me for knowing. I want you to give this for me to Octave. Tell her that it was my mother's, and say I sent it to her with my dear love."

Hardinge had risen too. "Will you let me tell you how glad I am you know this? I have always felt that I was missing something in missing your sympathy with our happiness."

"And you are *very* happy?"

"*Very* happy," said Hardinge gravely. And then his face broke up into a smile as he added: "But that is always your way. You demoralize one. You make me talk about myself until it needs all the accumulated experience of years to convince me that I am not the most conceited fellow living. And see! you are doing it now, and yet there are a hundred things I want to ask you about yourself, — what you are going to do, and all that. I wish you would tell me. You will write, — you will write to Octave of course. But there is so much one does not say in letters."

"Oh, how can I tell what I shall do?" said Barbara, walking up to the window and looking out at the night. There were lanterns moving about now,

and people coming and going by the gangway of the Trieste steamer. She was conscious of the cold touch of the glass and of the black and stormy night all the time, and yet it seemed as if every nerve in her body were strained with the effort to keep back any word which might grieve him. Never in any way to have hurt the creature we supremely love, — after all, that is something.

But her voice must have been less under her control than she imagined, for Hardinge looked at her doubtfully.

“Do you know, it is not like you to reject any one’s interest, even when it is stupidly expressed interest,” he began. And then the door opened quietly and Cesco Lalli entered.

He looked from his wife to her guest.

“I am glad to see you so much better, my dear. It was really hardly worth while, it was a pity to make our friend Hardinge lose all the music for such a — temporary — indisposition.”

“I was very much obliged to the contessa for letting me come home with her,” said Hardinge, promptly taking his hat from the table. He looked about the room and his eye fell upon his own bunch of flowers. “May I have one of those roses, for Octave?” he asked, looking at her and speaking English. And then he put out his hand. “I will say *au revoir* to you; I will not say good-by.”

“Good-by,” said Barbara, putting out her hand also.

And then a moment later the door closed and he was gone.

Lalli was sitting on the sofa, with his hat still on his head. The table was in front of him, and a round lamp with a shade. Barbara looked away from him. There were more boats crowding about the Trieste steamer, the light from the lanterns shining on the glistening steel prows, and making little broken tracks of gold across the black heaving water. The steam began to pour out of the funnel more quickly, in short, angry, white puffs.

Cesco sat and watched his wife for several moments in absolute silence. The dull, stupid look which crept over his face when he was angry began to make itself manifest. He breathed quickly. They made a curious picture, those two, a curious contrast; and there was something in the very immobility of her attitude which urged him to violent speech and action. He got up on his feet at last, moved by an uncontrollable fit of passion. He went and put his arm on the mantelpiece and looked at her.

"When you have *quite* finished watching the departure of your lover, perhaps you may find time to listen to what I have to say," he began.

Barbara gave a slight, almost imperceptible start. It was as if a stab had entered into her soul. She could feel the hurt, but the pain had not yet had time to make itself fully felt. She was only conscious of a sudden sickness at heart; it was more numbing surprise than actual grief. But he had gone on without giving her time to answer.

"I will not be made a fool of in this fashion. If you think to deceive me, — I tell you I will not be

made a fool of;" he stumbled over his words, and his voice went off into falsetto. "I tell you that man shall never enter my house again. Damn him! — with his English voice and his manner, as if there were not three people in the world fit to be spoken to. I forbid you to speak to him. Do you hear me, Barbara? — I forbid you. Or to that other fine friend of his, Mr. Lexeter. By —, I will be master in my own house. Do you hear me, Barbara?"

"I hear," said Barbara wearily, looking down at her own hands.

And then there was a horrible silence between them, — a cruel, blighting silence, in which all the murdered memories of the love, the tenderness, the confidence there had been between these two people rose from their graves to look with sad, reproachful eyes at Barbara's bruised and outraged heart. All the effort, all the belief of her life, went into that one minute which followed. She rose and stood facing her husband, with her hands clasped, hanging straight down before her, and her face upraised.

"Cesco —"

He was still standing with his back against the mantelpiece.

"*Non è vero.* It is not true; I do not believe you. You dare not deny that that man — that Hardinge is your lover?"

"I deny it absolutely. And it is impossible that you should not believe me, Cesco."

"I do not believe you. You know that you love him. Do you think I am blind? Have I not seen

the look in your face since the day he came here? You *dare* not say that you do not love him!"

"No," said Barbara; "I do love him — very, very dearly." She did not change her attitude, and her voice never trembled. "He does not care for me, Cesco. And he is going to marry Miss Damon. He has never said a word to me, never once, that all the world might not hear. I think he *could not* do a base thing; it is not in him." She spoke with a mournful sincerity, like some young martyr reciting a creed.

"And you — you have told him — this — I suppose?" asked Lalli, almost in a whisper. He removed his arm slowly from the mantelpiece, and took a step towards her. His face was absolutely livid. He had reached a point of passion in which all control over himself was lost. He was only conscious of the wild-beast instinct of tearing to pieces whatever opposed him. Barbara looked into his face and trembled. His eyes had a dull, restless look, as if they saw nothing clearly, and he moved them from side to side.

He repeated his question.

"And you have told him this, I suppose?"

"No," said Barbara faintly, and putting out her hand by sheer force of instinct.

He came a step or two nearer, as if he had not heard her speak. And then all at once his face changed. For him the crisis was past. He felt that this other man had never had the luxury of considering him ridiculous; he had never at any time been pitied by Hardinge. He threw himself down on a chair by the table and covered his face with his hands.



In this bewildering reaction of feeling he felt faint with exhaustion. He began to sob like a girl.

Presently he was aware that his wife was speaking.

"Perhaps you do not believe it; you do not realize it yet, but some time, I am very sure, you will be sorry for these things that you have said to me. And I am very sorry for you that you have said them. It is cruel," — her voice faltered a little, but she steadied it and went on, — "it is a cruel memory for both of us. It is miserable. I do not want to be unjust to you, God knows I do not want to be unjust, but — See, Cesco; once, a long, long time ago, at Ostia, you asked me to marry you, and, because I did not care for you then, and I told you so, you asked me to be to you like your friend and your sister. And I believed in you. I meant what I promised. Well, you know how that ended. I think," said Barbara, with inexpressible mournfulness, — "I think there is nothing in which you have not changed. And — and since our marriage —"

She was silent. The hoarse puff of the steamer grew more continuous; they could both hear it distinctly now.

"Oh," said Barbara passionately, "I meant to have been of so much use to you. I thought that you were unhappy, that you needed me. And oh, it is all so difficult to understand! I have tried so hard — so hard to do what is best for others. And now —"

She turned to the window, and pressed her forehead against the cool glass. The lights had moved away. The Trieste steamer was gone.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

SOME of these things Lexeter remembered. Some had been told to him. Others he only guessed at dimly, drawing his conclusions from what he knew of Barbara's character and history.

He lingered on the Pincian hill that night, long after every other promenader had departed. He stayed until the policeman in charge stepped up to him, civilly enough, and touched his hat and intimated that it was time the gates were closed.

And even then he could not make up his mind to go to his hotel. The very idea of *table d'hôte* was repugnant. He went and dined by himself, at the corner table of a little *trattoria* somewhere near St. Peter's. It was a small, cheap place, much frequented by artists, and with some reputation for its wine. He had dined there once or twice in the old days with Hardinge. There was still the same stout, comely Roman matron behind the little counter. Nine years had hardly done more than add another fold or two to her ample chin. But the man who waited upon him was a new man. And perhaps his palate had grown more dainty in the interval: the wine had lost something of the old flavor.

"*Eh! cosa vuole, signore?* We are not immortal.

And it is true the taxes grow heavier every summer," the padrona said, shrugging her round, comfortable shoulders philosophically, and running the knitting-needle she held through her hair. It was an old gesture, which Lexeter remembered. He laughed, and walked out of the shop into the street.

To St. Peter's. At this hour the great square in front of the church was quite deserted. He walked all the way up under one of the colonnades, and then turned back and went and sat down at the foot of the small obelisk between the fountains. He sat down and thought. In these nine years Lexeter's own position had altered very much for the better. He had worked hard. He had made a certain reputation for himself; what he wrote was held to be worth accepting, or at least worth refuting. It was the sort of success which he valued; he had no reason to be dissatisfied. And yet, at his age, the sight of a girl's face had had the power to make all the rest of his life seem valueless; the sound of a girl's voice, the touch of her hand, the smell of the flowers she wore, were potent enough to make all this hard-won success seem a mere makeshift, the simulacra of what he had wanted — and missed.

Lexeter was not what is commonly called a religious man. Indeed I think it was he who first described Positivism as the only religion without perquisites. His creed was that creed of brave souls who have sought refuge from pain neither in the bitter drugs of scepticism nor in the gentle anodynes of Christianity. He was a Positivist; but he was

above all a man of sentiment; a mind open to all fine issues. As he sat there on that calm spring night, hearing, as in a dream, the soft splash of the fountains, looking up once more at the limpid, sombre blue of the Italian sky, he felt more intensely than ever before how much of all that is best in us can be summed up by one word — renunciation.

He thought of Barbara. He saw her sweet face rising out of the darkness, the one face in the world which he loved, a face “ennobled by a vast regret.” He thought of her as of one of those who “dared beyond their strength, and hazarded against their judgment, and in extremities were of an excellent faith;” their only reward an ardent belief, a passionate hope, that the sum total of existing good may be greater for all bravely borne anguish, for generous effort, for patience, for self-sacrifice, for all austere devotion to great and unattainable ends.

And then again he thought of the life she must be leading. Many of us are called to self-denial, there is nothing new surely in the fact. But upon this girl, while she was very young, had fallen the necessity of foregoing love. He thought with passionate tenderness of all that life might have been made to her. It was worse than useless, but the thought clung to him persistently. He thought of what her daily life must be in that lonely Italian villa, with a child for her companion, looking after the lives of a handful of rude peasants, because — the remembrance flashed across him suddenly — that had been one of Hardinge’s dearest theories in the old days, that education of the lower class.

I think myself that he was unconsciously exaggerating the bareness of her existence. Because, after all, in all work honestly done there is to a certain degree satisfaction; because there are good moments in every life, however joyless; moments when the sun shines and winds are warm, and there is solemn meaning in the great marshalling of the clouds; moments when the soul of the world, the presence of the great Mother Earth, is with us, bringing deep comfort and rest from pain. And Time is inexorable. There is no cry of agony in the world that with time does not grow first hoarse and then dumb. Lexeter too was aware of this growing numbness.

It was late, very late, when he returned to his hotel. The house was all shut up; there was only one light left burning in the hall, and one of the under-porters sitting up for him, — a sleepy lad, who came blinking up the stair after him to see that he had the key of his room. Lexeter was apt to be rather imperative in his manner to servants, but he spoke kindly enough to this boy. He caught sight of their two faces, this curly-haired lad's and his own, in the glass which hung over the chimney-piece, and he laughed; it was rather grim laughter.

"And *that* is the face of a man who can spend a whole night sitting sighing at the moon like a — like a — Oh well, you know, if this is the sort of thing one is coming to —" He blew out his candle savagely, and tried to sleep. It was quite useless. The odor of those violets haunted him; their clinging perfume seemed full of uncertain promises; there

was all the intoxication in it and all the sadness of youth.

Towards morning he fell into a troubled sleep. He woke late. There was a particular call he wished to make before leaving Rome, or else he used this intention as an excuse to himself for remaining a day longer. It was hard to decide what was his principal reason for staying. He seemed to have nothing very important to do. In the morning he read several of the English papers. He went out for a long walk, in the course of which it occurred to him to go and have a look at some frescos recently finished in the Church of San Lorenzo. He remembered having seen a mention of the painter's name, and it was a name he knew.

There was an old man raking away the dead leaves and rubbish from one of the cemetery walks as he left the church, and for some reason Lexeter stopped and began talking to him.

"Ay, it is a fine place of its kind," the old fellow said, straightening his back and glancing with some complacency around him. "Take a deal of keeping in order, do graves. Most people think o' them as quiet enough places; but, lor' bless you, sir, garden plots is nothing in comparison. And so particular as some of the people is. Not but what that does n't generally wear off in a year or so. We drops tea-roses and takes to monthlies after the first year as a rule." He took up his rake again and moved off a few steps. "Not as they're all alike, even in that. Some o' them Italians shows much the same feelin' like as if they were born and bred in old England.

There's one gentleman as comes occasionally to look after that stone, for instance" (he pointed out the place with his rake); "you would n't believe how that gentleman do look after it. And it must have been here a good while. It was put up before *my* time, I know, and that's going on for nine years now. He's a quiet-looking gentleman too. You would n't give him credit for so much feeling, to look at him."

Lexeter glanced in the direction indicated. It gave him a curious feeling to see a name he was familiar with. So this was where they had buried Regina Cardella, little Guido's mother? He remembered her glorious beauty. There was a little bird perching on the edge of the headstone, who flew away at his approach. He read the date; she would have been thirty now if she had lived, the same age as Barbara. He looked down at her grave with the strangest feeling of compassion. He knew very little about her except that she was resplendently beautiful, and that Barbara had been with her the night she died. Probably, he reflected, she had had no particular history. They were utter strangers, and yet he felt sorry for her. It was a pity to have lost that much beauty out of the world.

The call he wished to make was on two old ladies, on Miss Maclean and her sister, Miss Janet.

It was the same servant who opened the door to his ring. Lexeter would have been disappointed to have found the servant changed. But here at least nothing was altered. As he entered the warm, close little drawing-room the last nine years seemed to

melt away like a dream. There before him was the same small fire burning noiselessly and discreetly under its ashes; the sunlight fell in the old way on the same neat rows of flower-pots in the window, the same old circle of precious miniatures on the wall. The two white-haired old ladies were sitting one on either side of the fire, dozing peacefully through the quiet afternoon.

Of the two, Miss Janet received him with the most cordiality. Miss Elizabeth looked upon Lexeter as no longer young enough to be attractive. She wondered somewhat at Barbara's taste in selecting this middle-aged man for a friend,—and she too with a fine young husband like Count Lalli! But even Miss Janet could not conceal some slight surprise at the unexpectedness of his visit; Lexeter himself began to feel embarrassed.

And yet he felt no impulse to go. The old charm of this place, the charm of peace and long continuance, was upon him. He looked with a pleased, amused tenderness at all the small, old, carefully kept ornaments about the room. He listened to Miss Elizabeth's sweet, thin, gracious old voice; he looked at the sunlight falling upon her shiny white hair, upon her soft old hands, peacefully folded, upon the stiff, formal folds of her gown. The proud old head was a little more bent, the hands more tremulous.

"There are not many people that my sister would play for now," Miss Janet said, looking at the little piano; "but there is no one plays music like my sister Elizabeth."



They had shown him all their little treasures: their father's miniature, the glove of Mary Stuart, the portrait of Miss Maclean attired for her first ball. It was Miss Janet who showed these things and gave the explanations, while Miss Elizabeth looked on with dignified interest, and made conversation for their guest.

He asked her to play for him "in memory of old times," and she consented graciously. "We don't often make use of the balcony now, but if you would like to step out on it, Mr. Lexeter?" Miss Janet added briskly: "Barbara—the Contessa Lalli, I would be saying—was always of the opinion that one heard my sister's music better from the balcony."

The door was rusty now; it grated on its disused hinges.

Lexeter stepped out on the narrow balcony. He saw the well-remembered view,—the river, the bridges, the cypresses; St. Peter's, and the pines of the Pamphili hill. It was a gray, tepid afternoon. He was tired. He leaned against the railing, listening vaguely to the thin and melancholy tone of the old piano,—some of the notes were dumb, some of the strings broken; it seemed as if the poor old instrument was protesting against being disturbed. And all about him the divine unrest of the spring was in the air. He looked at the same sky and the same blue line of mountains; there was nothing changed here,—nothing changed but himself. For Lexeter had lost his youth. He thought of Barbara still, but he thought of her as a man thinks of some

dear and distant memory. Life had stepped in between them. And after all, he asked himself,—and the feeble, worn-out notes of the old piano seemed to make a sort of tinkling refrain to the question,—after all, was this not the better part, to accept without murmuring what seemed like the failure of her purpose? Failure in life is to have no ideal. Barbara had never lost hers.

He went into the room again, closing the creaking door gently behind him.

Miss Elizabeth had left the piano now; she was sitting with folded hands beside the fire.

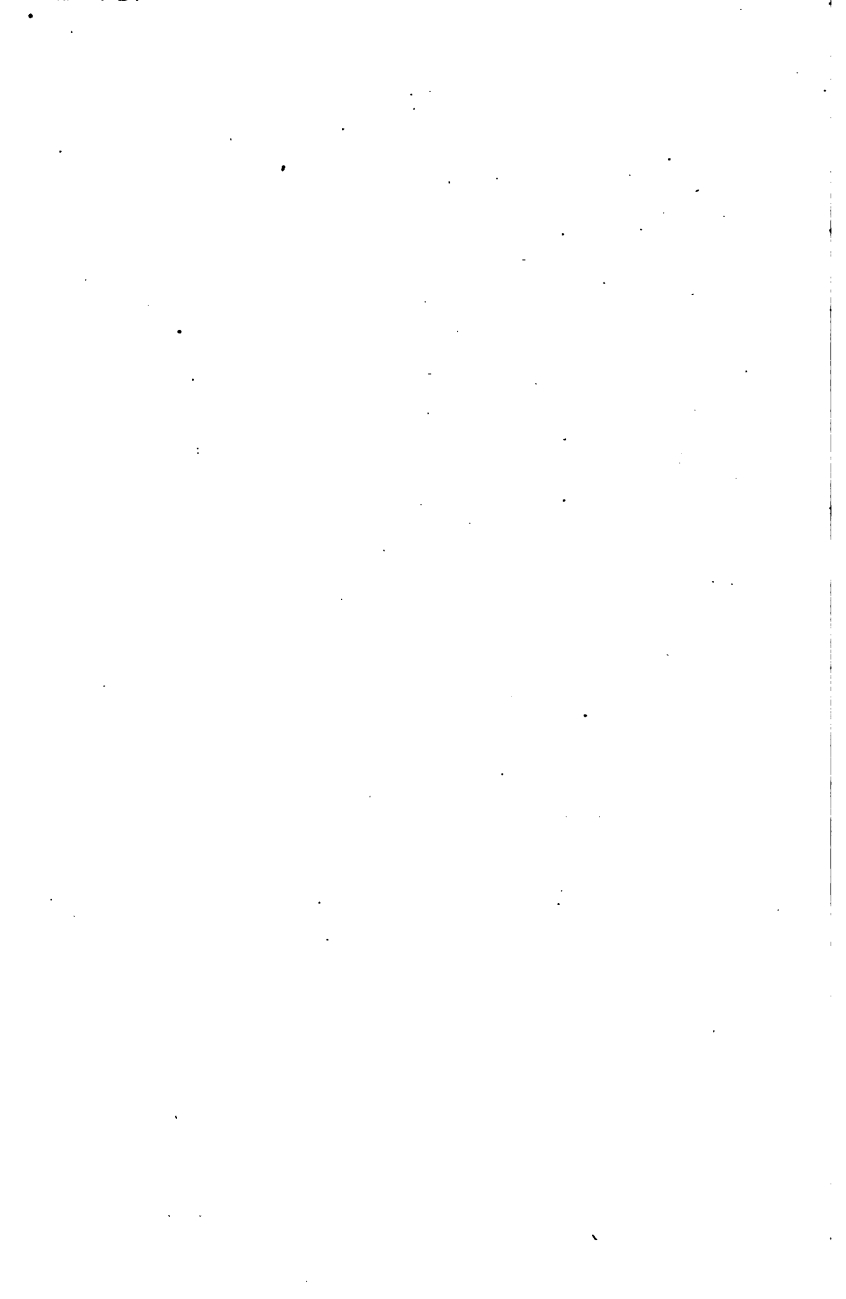
She looked up with a start as he entered. She had almost forgotten his presence there.

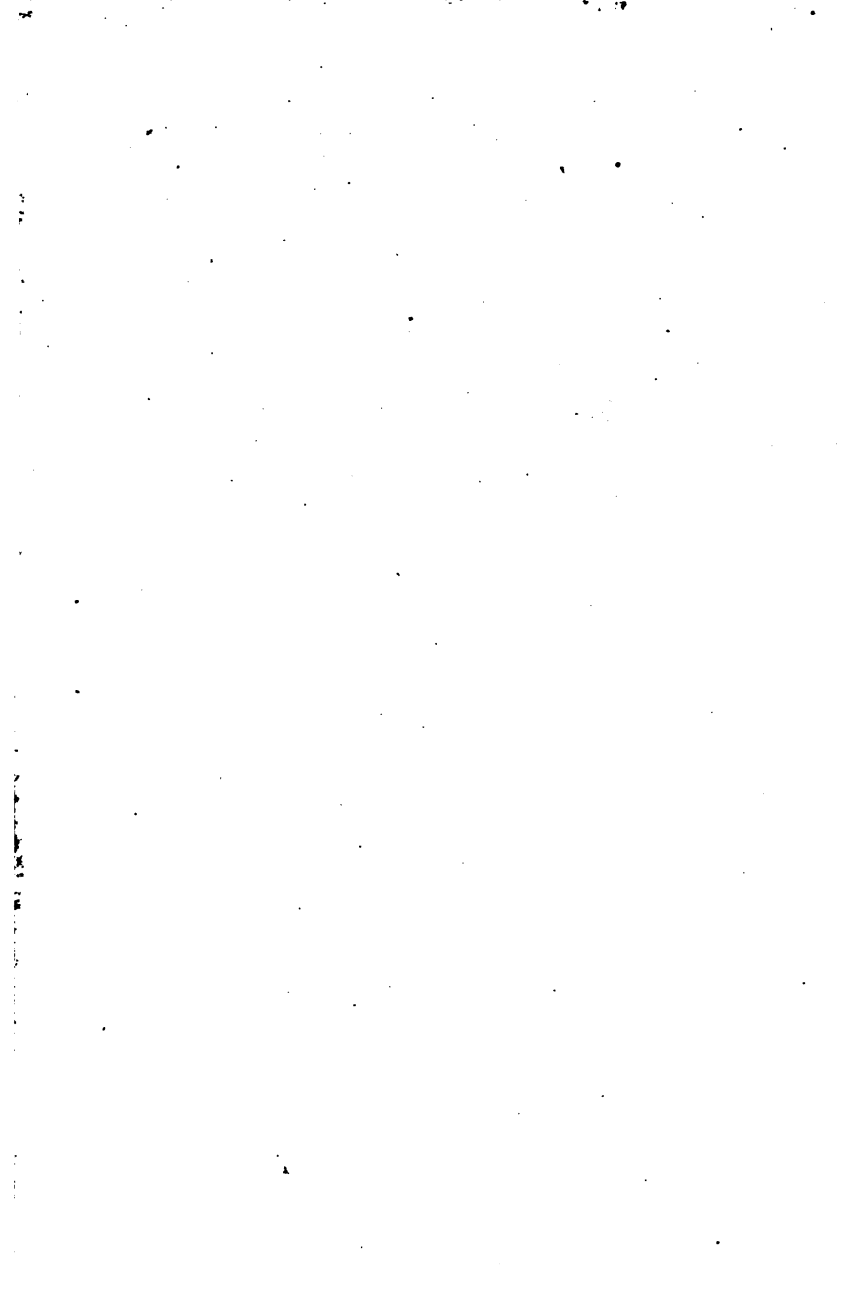
“And are you going the day, Mr. Lexeter? and are you not coming back?” she asked gently.

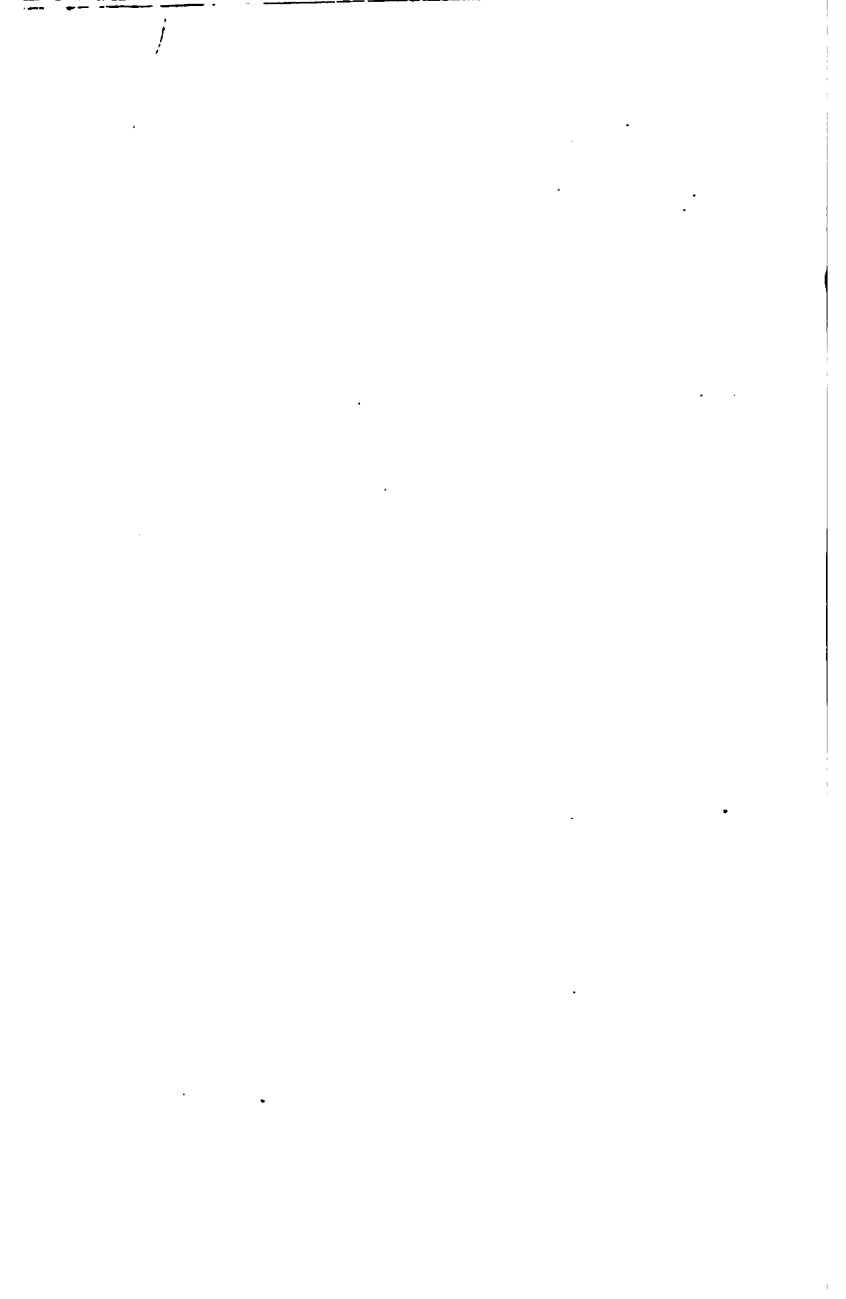
“No,” said Lexeter, taking her soft old hand in his, “I am not coming back again.”

He looked behind him as he passed through the doorway; it was his last memory of Rome,—a memory of old age, of faithfulness, of resignation,—a memory of peace.

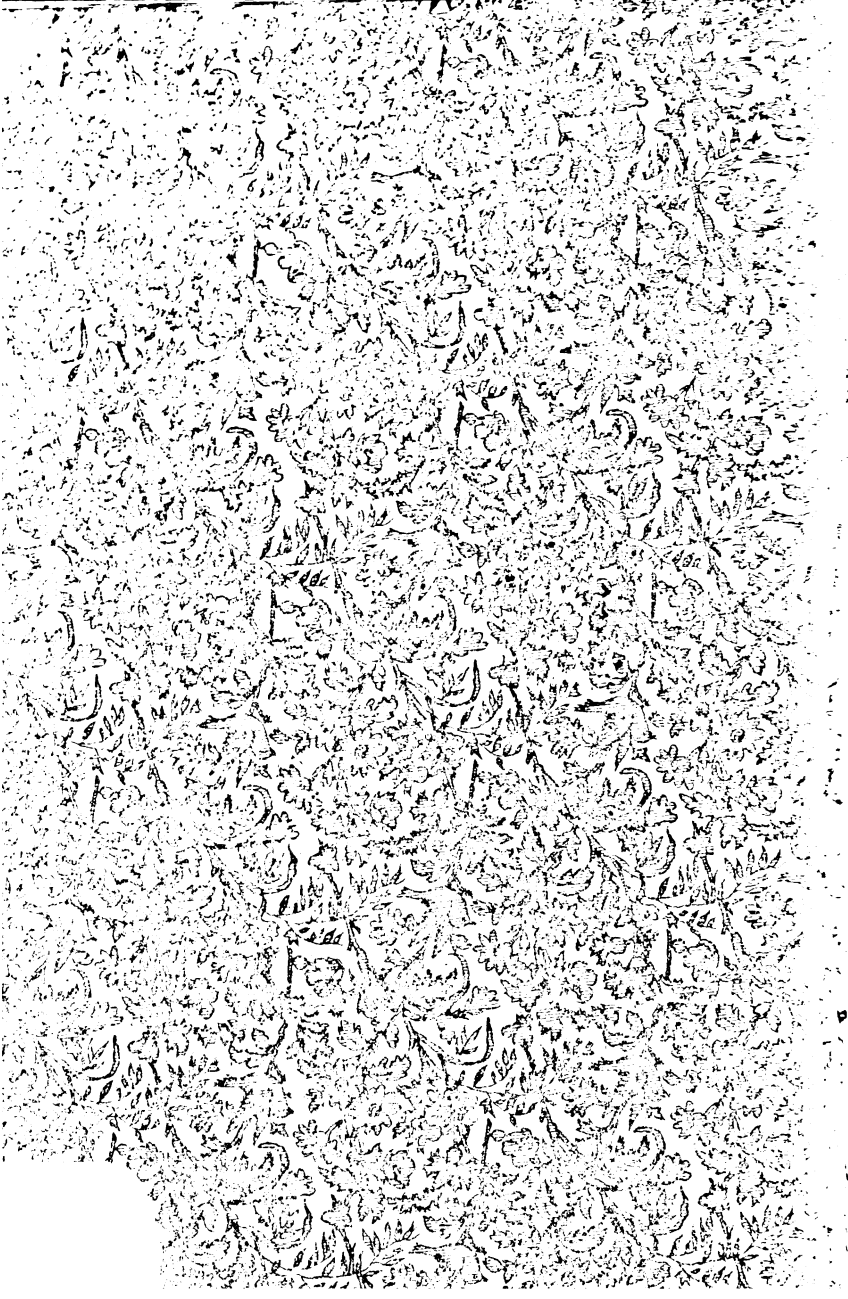
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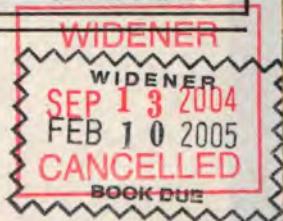


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